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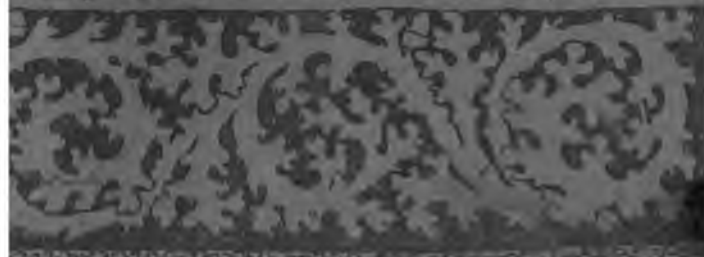
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MONA'S CHOICE.

CHAPTER I.

A PROPOSAL.

THE "up" train was expected momentarily at the little junction of Galesford, from whence a line branched off to some villages and the county town.

A couple of commercial travellers, whose large neatly-strapped cases were piled on a hand-truck, stood at one end of the platform, in conversation of an amusing description, for they laughed loud and frequently.

A gentleman, covered from head to foot in a large dark ulster, walked to and fro smoking a cigar, and peering sharply into the thick mist which hid the line up to a few yards beyond the station.

The loose wrap he wore did not conceal his air of distinction. The eyes that watched so eagerly for the train, were light steely blue, his colouring was sunburnt brown, a trifle too dark for his hair and moustaches.

"Five minutes behind time," he said, glancing at the clock over the door of the booking-office, and addressing one of the two porters who were waiting about.

"It often is, sir! You see they have often to wait at Brenton for the Altonborough passengers. It's express after this."

"Look after my luggage! It is in the waiting-room. My name is on it—Captain Lisle—I'll be back by the six-twenty, and will not forget you."

"Thank ye, sir! I'll take care of it right enough."

"Two-fifteen? and here it comes!" exclaimed Captain Lisle, throwing away his cigar as the engine rushed screaming out of the dim distance, and approaching the edge of the platform he peered sharply into the carriages.

In a first-class compartment a young lady sat alone. Lisle proceeded to open the door.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the urbane guard. "This is a ladies' carriage—there's plenty of room in the next."

"All right! I know the lady; she will permit me to travel a few miles in her company. Will you not?" raising his deer-stalker's cap.

"Oh, Captain Lisle!" she exclaimed, with a swift blush. "Yes! of course."

"Don't cram in any women or babies," said Lisle aside quickly to the guard, pressing some coin of the realm into his hand.

"All right, sir!" significantly. "Jump in."

A shrill whistle, and they were off.

"I hope you will forgive my intrusion. But as I had no chance of seeing you after that telegram came, I thought I would try to say good-bye *en route*."

He unfastened his ulster, and removed his cap, showing a close crop of crisp brown hair, and a rather good-looking resolute face. His keen eyes grew softer as they dwelt on his companion. She was worth looking at. Her height, even as she sat reclining in the corner of the carriage, was evidently above the average; the eyes with which she regarded him were very deep grey—large, liquid, and at the moment pathetic, almost solemn; her eyebrows were many shades darker than her hair, which admirers called golden, and detractors red, both having a fair show of reason for their opinions. Indeed the contrast between her sunny locks and her nearly black brows and eyelashes, generally struck those who met her for the first time. Her complexion was of the purely fair description which goes with hair of her colour,—and when in repose, there was a haughty, refined expression about her mouth, which, though finely formed, was not small. Her travelling dress of dark green cloth, simple and compact, and a velvet hat of the same colour, with a small plume of black-cock's feathers, was most becoming. As Captain Lisle spoke, a quiet smile parted her lips and she said gently,—

"I have nothing to forgive; you are very good to take the trouble I fancied you were at Chillworth Castle by this time, you started early."

"I started at that unearthly hour to secure some private conversation with you."

"Indeed!"

Again a blush, fainter this time, flitted over the lady's cheek.

"Yes. I am going to say what may perhaps offend you,—to interfere where I certainly have no right, but my sincere interest in you—my—my ardent regret that fortune should treat you so kindly, urges me to risk making an ass of myself."

"You puzzle me! I feel vaguely there is something I do quite understand behind this sudden illness of my poor grandmother. Everyone seemed so sorry for me,—and Lady Mary, in its kindness itself, said she feared she had lost a great deal of money. Do tell me what you know. You always seem to me to know everything."

"I wish I did *not* know the present state of affairs,—and I you did not look as if those grand eyes of yours had been awake all night."

Again she smiled, a somewhat tremulous smile this time,

deed I could not sleep ! I was haunted by the recollection many quarrels with grannie,—who is really fond of me, and en very, very good to me ! I must try and make up to her past."

can imagine that Mrs. Newburgh's rule is of the iron rod," said Captain Lisle. "Nor do I suppose that you are too subject ! I fear," he added gravely, softly, "that a terrible awaits her—and you. The speculation in which she has in her whole capital has come to grief,—and I fear she has lost hing."

ow do you know ?"

r Robert Everard told me all particulars last night—when the men had left the smoking-room. Mrs. Newburgh's soliloquy also his. The sudden shock has been too much for her, and it on a feverish attack."

o you mean to say that we shall have no money at all ?"

ear you will not ! Everard spoke openly to me, knowing the it I take in you, of which I hope you too are aware."

e have always been very good friends," she said shyly, with ing lips.

as ! and for that friendship's sake I am about to break my habit of not interfering with what does not absolutely concern o risk the snubbing you are quite capable of administering." paused, and gazed for a moment at the delicate, downcast oposite to him, his brows contracting in a sudden frown.

hy should I snub you ?" she asked, without looking up.

ait till I have finished. Will you believe me when I say that as sleepless as yourself last night ? My fancy—no, I am not iginative man—my experience, depicted all the hardship of t ; for I have known difficulties—money difficulties ; poverty, a hundred fold worse for a woman, a proud, delicately nur- woman, like yourself ; and for you there is no escape, such as can find in a good appointment—I hope for one myself in before many weeks are over."

it women can work too," she said wonderingly. "Why do r to frighten me ?"

ecause I want you to seize the only way of escape that offers." cape ? How ?"

ear me out ! I am going to rush in—probably like a fool—angels might hesitate to tread ; but I know what life is, and open your eyes. After Everard had told me all he knew, I o my room, and Waring, who had been dosing over an evening

as he a confidante of our troubles too ?" she interrupted, with t curl of the lip.

was !—that need not affect you. Waring followed, and asked w words with me. You know what a shy, awkward fellow he

is. Well, I was amazed at his clearness and fluency—pray hear out. He said he came to consult me, knowing that I had been tolerably intimate terms with Mrs. Newburgh and yourself all season—in short, he confessed—what I already guessed—that he was desperately in love with you; that he was afraid you did think much of him; and asked me if, under the circumstances, he thought it would be good form to propose for you! He said it hurt him to the heart, to think of your being deprived of anything that could give you pleasure or comfort,—I must say he spoke like a gentleman.”

“It was very strange his consulting *you*!” she exclaimed, with unconscious emphasis.

“I do not think it was,” he returned, with studied composure, while he watched her varying colour; “we have become rather chums.”

“And you?”

“I advised him to make the venture, and I made this opportunity to advise you to accept him.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the young lady, suddenly pressing her handkerchief to her brow. “There must be an east wind. Such a sharp pain shot through my temple! Would you draw up that window?”

The pain was so severe that her voice sounded unsteady. He obeyed—and resuming his seat and his argument proceeded,—

“Waring is not a bad fellow, and he is rich, really rich, no matter if the richness is new or old. He is not as dull as he seems, the dullness is no drawback to a husband. He adores you!—but I am half afraid of you; you may reign supreme; you can help your grandmother; you will even thank me hereafter for showing this way to escape from the horrors of genteel poverty, only must *not* hesitate in your acceptance of him.” Lisle went on pressively. “He is a shy bird; if you are not kindly, he will fly away; you need not affect any passion, simply promise to be his wife. He has a high opinion of your integrity and honour. He will trust you, and when I come back after a few years of broil I shall see you, I hope, what you ought to be, a leader and an ornament of society, perhaps to be rewarded for my enormous usefulness by a renewal of your friendship and confidence!”

While he spoke, his companion had opened her travelling-bag, taken out a flask of eau de Cologne, and dropped some on her handkerchief, which she applied to her forehead.

“Ah!” she said, “it is a little better!” She raised her eyes to his with a smile, a polite smile. “You are really very good to all this trouble for me: it is more than I could expect! You do not exhaust yourself in persuasion: I really do not dislike Waring; on the contrary, he is evidently malleable, and by no means bad-looking,—rather young perhaps, but that is a fault which corrects itself. I had no idea he thought of throwing the hands

chief to me ! I am much obliged for your warning not to scare a shy bird ! It is not always that a man is gifted with a figure as well as a fortune."

She spoke with languid composure, keeping her eyes on his.

"I am very glad you take so sensible a view of my suggestion," he returned, with alight suppressed surprise ; "as to looks, that is a matter of taste : I do not admire the 'prize-fighter' style myself ; but Waring is quite six or seven years older than you are ! I assure you it is a relief to my mind that you deign to accept my counsel, and do not snub me for meddling."

"That would be a bad return for your disinterested friendship. I do not think many people would imagine you capable of so Quixotic an effort to succour a damsel in distress ! You do not do yourself justice, Captain Lisle ! Now, do tell me something of your own plans ! for I reciprocate your friendly interest, I assure you."

"My plans," he repeated, in a different and less steady tone.

"They are simple enough. My uncle, General Forester, has promised me an appointment on his staff. It may keep me in India the best part of my life ; but I shall have leave of absence from time to time, and so keep in touch with civilization."

"That will be delightful ! And you really have known commonplace money troubles like other people ?"

"Yes ; very decidedly yes."

He was feeling curiously displaced from his position of superior firmness and worldly knowledge. The unexpected acceptance of his suggestion by this fair gentle creature, who was barely nineteen, threw him off his balance.

"Then I hope they are over for ever," she remarked, in a kindly tone. "You must pick up a Begum in India. Yet, no ! I should not like to be less bountiful than you are. I would give you a pretty, as well as a wealthy wife. Mr. Waring is handsome, or rather he will develop into a handsome man. I think you have chosen well."

"I did not choose at all. I simply did my best to induce you not to throw away a good chance. Are you serious ? I do not quite understand you, Mona."

She raised a warning finger playfully.

"As I am not, according to you, to keep my name much longer, may I let me hear it always ; it is far prettier than Waring—Miss Jocelyn, if you please."

She had grown quite animated ; a faint colour replaced her extreme pallor ; her large eyes sparkled ; she dominated the conversation. Captain Lisle watched her closely ; her manner was quite natural, while his lost the curt decision which characterized it at first. She questioned him as to how many horses Waring could keep, as to where they should live,—said she was glad he was not encumbered with landed estates, as she would like to ramble about

and much more to the same effect, half in jest. At length he look at his watch.

"In ten minutes I must say good-bye," he said. "I get out the next station, and wait for the four-fifty train to Galesford."

"What a long tiresome wait. You really have sacrificed yours to friendship."

"I have," he returned emphatically. "I wonder if you exact appreciate the sacrifice."

"I do indeed."

"May I not call and learn from your own lips how you are going on?"

"You see it is a little uncertain where you may find us. I feel they do not allow visitors at the workhouse, which may be our destination, if Mr. Waring has not the goodness to charge himself with our support."

"It is too bad that these wealthy new men get the pick of everything! Ah! here we are. Do you know, it is awfully hard to say good-bye; I really feel a little murderous towards Waring."

"Beware! I have taken him under my protection."

"It is not good-bye, however; I will see you in ten days or fortnight. Till then, *addio!*"

He pressed her hand close, she withdrew it in fierce haste; the next moment he was standing on the platform, yet another, and the train was again in motion. Miss Clifford kissed her hand with saucy smile as she passed out of sight. The only other passenger who alighted gave up his ticket, and Lisle was left to pace the damp gravel, and think over the conversation he had just held.

"I am well out of it," was his first thought; "but she took my advice rather differently from what I expected. I fancied we would have had high-flown sentiment, perhaps tears and despair. I suspect I do not quite understand my fair friend. How beautiful fair she is. I did not dream she had so much pluck. By Jove, she turned my flank by her ready acceptance of my suggestion: but I fancy it was a tremendous blow, for all that! She was growing fond of me—I know it, I feel it—and I never was so near making fool of myself about any woman as about Mona Clifford; but would not do! Matrimony is a hideous institution. Even Mona's fine eyes, and general charm (she is charming!) would lose the effect in a few years—perhaps in a few months, and I might be brute, or she would think me one. Women are so terribly impractical and illogical! If they are worth their salt, they expect the same constancy they bestow; if they are capable of making allowance, they demand a wide margin for their own vagaries. Now really am loyal and disinterested in wishing her to marry Waring. I couldn't possibly undertake her grandmother! She would be too expensive a luxury. Waring can afford to pension her off; at any

Mona will clearly understand that in arranging her future

don't count. It would have been wrong to allow her to make any mistake or lose a good chance. I feel I have done my duty. I wonder if we can renew our platonic at any future time? Mona at the head of a good establishment would be quite irresistible, and Waring is one of those happy individuals who thinks no evil. Yes, I have certainly done the right thing for her and for myself, but there's both force and fire under her indolent softness. I wonder how she will turn out! She surely does not admire that big, rugged, overgrown schoolboy. But she may choose to assert she does, till she believes it. Women defy one's calculations. Anyhow, I did not make my early start this morning for nothing."

Meanwhile Mona was carried deeper and deeper into the gloom of the fast closing October evening. Alone—unwatched, she let loose the reins of her self-control, and yielded to the storm of shame and despair which rent her soul.

She had indeed "grown fond" of Lisle, after months of frequent intercourse, during which he had sought her with so much carefully veiled assiduity—and won her confidence by a happy assumption of elder-brotherly authority, flecked with gleams of passionate admiration, which seemed to flash out in spite of himself, and were real enough. He had roused her interest, and flattered her youthful vanity—for St. John Lisle was a man of good position, a favourite with fine ladies, a smart cavalry officer, of whose success in life no one had a doubt. To feel that she, a simple *débutante*, exercised an influence and attraction on such a man—was infinitely exhilarating. Lisle had been the chum and favourite brother officer of Mrs. Newburgh's favourite nephew, and this was an excuse for an unusual degree of intimacy—which had increased as time rolled on, and reached a dangerous pitch during their stay at Lady Mary Everard's, the last blissful days enjoyed by Mona. Captain Lisle had begun to fear that he was going too far, and was annoyed with himself for his reluctance to draw back, when the news of Mrs. Newburgh's misfortunes—the confession of young Waring, came to relieve him from the gathering difficulties of his situation. Now, a kind of lurid light from the burning of Mona's indignant heart seemed to bring out the bitter truth with stinging distinctness. She seemed to be present at that interview between Lisle and Leslie Waring. She knew, as though she had heard the words, that Waring—having noticed the understanding between her and the man who was all but her avowed lover, had asked him if they were engaged,—if it would be interfering with his (Lisle's) rights were he to offer himself to her in this crisis of her fortune. Lisle had, no doubt, disclaimed all wish to make her his wife, and coolly given his approval to Waring's pretensions. More, he had not hesitated to recommend his rival! What a reverse to the picture her fancy had hitherto presented, of Lisle vainly struggling against his love for her—hesitating lest her relatives or herself should not think him a sufficiently good match

for her—of his ecstasy when the time came, and she permitted him to see how dear he had grown. Now behold! the time of trial came, and he was eager to hand her over to another. How could she have been so blind—so deluded? Her rage was more against herself than against him. Her long slender fingers clutched the arms of the seat with feverish force, in her agony and self-contempt. How could she have been so weak, so conceited, as to suppose that she had become all in all to such a man as St John Lisle? Yet, yet he did admire her and seek her! A hundred instances crowded on her memory which might well have misled her; important trifles which could not have occurred had he not loved her at the time. He had, why did he change so suddenly? What had she done to forfeit the tenderness of which she was so sure? No! She was not all self-deceived. He was false, fickle, cruel—she might be laid hard upon herself! Then she questioned the prudence of her own action on hearing his astounding proposal. Was it well to have played the part she did, in affecting to entertain it? Would it have been wiser and more dignified to have rebuked him for his interference, and refused to listen to his pleading? For the present, ever desire was merged in her passionate wish to hide her wounds, and make Lisle believe she was as strong, as worldly, as indifferent to himself—that his conduct did not cost her a pang. What a lesson he had taught her of her own insignificance, of the delusions she had trusted. As to poor Waring, she bestowed small consideration on his honest affection for her. Of all the house-party at Harrow Chase, she had taken least notice of him. Their previous intercourse had consisted of a few meetings at evening parties, where he had perseveringly asked her to dance, and she had as perseveringly endeavoured to evade him. Of this he was unaware, as her manners were softly gracious, and she hated to give pain.

Now this ungraceful, shy, inarticulate young man was thrust upon her by Lisle, who had so often turned him into ridicule. Anything was good enough for a girl who was penniless and almost unprotected! It would go hard with her, she thought, while her cheek glowed, and her heart beat fast—very hard, before she would consent to marry him. It was almost impossible he could desire such a union himself, he always seemed so ill at ease in her presence. She wished him a better fate! Then the vision of Lisle rose before her, distinguished, self-reliant, strong, always ready to say the right thing—a man with whom the highest dared not take a liberty, and his voice vibrated again on the chords of memory, his eyes looked into hers. No! she had not deceived herself—there had been moments when St John Lisle had loved her passionately, and they had gone by for ever. Grannie might regain her little fortune, wealth might pour in upon them, but nothing could ever be to her what it had been. Between the present and the past a great gulf yawned—which nothing could fill up. And poor grannie! Mona's heart re-

reached her for having utterly forgotten grannie, who had been so grieved by the terrible loss which had befallen her. How her proud, worldly, yet sound nature would wither under the disgrace of poverty. Grannie who loved her so well, even while she tyrannized over her—she had often been rebellious, selfish, now she would try and comfort the poor old woman. She had built such hopes, too, on Mona's success, now everything was crumbled in the dust. The blank dreariness of the future appalled her. How could she live on—and if grannie succumbed to this attack, what was to become of her? At the thought of her isolation, of all the benefits she had received from her aged protectress, her grief and agitation found vent in a flood of tears, which lasted for many miles, yet brought relief and the calmness of exhaustion.

The Honourable Mrs. Newburgh, sister of the late and aunt of the present Viscount Sunderline, had had much disappointment in her long life. Beginning with all the advantages of rank and beauty, she refused numerous excellent offers—to accept, at the mature age of thirty-five, the good-looking horsey son of a Yorkshire squire. He loved her, but he also feared her—which condition of mind led to much concealment of difficulties, and their consequent complication. Mrs. Newburgh was a woman of strong will, and some business capacity, and she always held on firmly to her own small fortune. Her only son went into the army, and was killed at Inkerman. Her only daughter, who resembled her father in character, formed a strong attachment to an obscure young Scotsman, whom she met accidentally in the Highlands, under somewhat romantic circumstances. Mrs. Newburgh set her face against so disgraceful a union; she dragged her pretty daughter from one Continental court to another, and finally tried to force her to marry an Englishman of high position and large fortune. This was too much, and the weak, simple, frightened girl fled to her Scotch lover. Her mother renounced her, and never saw her face again.

From this time Mrs. Newburgh devoted herself to increasing her fortune, both by saving and speculating. She returned to London, and once more took her place in society.

The announcement of her daughter's death made little or no change in her way of life; she made no attempt to communicate with the bereaved husband, and seemed to forget she had ever had a daughter. About five years later she was startled by a letter from the minister of a church in the neighbourhood of Glasgow, describing the last moments of Kenneth Craig, who had been a broken man ever since the death of his wife, and enclosing a brief letter to Mrs. Newburgh from the deceased. In it he simply said that the pay of a bank clerk had been too small to permit him to lay anything by for his little girl, that his own people were poor, that he trusted her mother's mother would so far forgive as not to punish the innocent, and begged her to give the child sufficient education to earn her

bread hereafter. She was named, he said, Mona Jocelyn, after her mother and her uncle.

Mrs. Newburgh answered this appeal by sending for the little bright-eyed six-yearling, and placing her at a school specially arranged for children whose parents were either dead or absent. She was in the country, and kept by a quiet motherly old maid. For some time her grandmother never saw Mona, but one spring, when the child had nearly attained her tenth year, scarlet fever broke out in the school, and little Mona was sent off without a word of warning to Mrs. Newburgh, who had been spending a few months in town and was packed up and ready to start for the Continent.

Though dreadfully annoyed by the *contretemps*, Mrs. Newburgh was struck and pleased with the improvement and promise of her granddaughter, especially as she was very like her late uncle, her reddish hair being a legacy from the plebeian Craigs. Finally she took her abroad, and placed her first at a convent school in Paris and after in an educational establishment of a very superior description at Dresden. Here Mrs. Newburgh occasionally visited her, and she remained till she was seventeen, when she went to reside with her grandmother in London; she continued to study music under the best masters, and was always present when Mrs. Newburgh received. The spring before the opening of this story, she had been presented, her grandmother was well satisfied with her social success, and hoped for a brilliant marriage, when the blow which ruined all.

It was quite dark when Mona reached St. Pancras: she was utterly weary, and profoundly still.

As a porter threw open the carriage door, a respectable foreign-looking man, somewhat tan-coloured in complexion, and pear-shaped in figure, going small to the feet and spreading out roundly about him aside. Raising his hat, he said in German,—

“Welcome, my *fraulein*! I hope you are not fatigued.”

“Yes, a little, *Wehner*! How is my grandmother?”

“Better, my *fraulein*! but weak! ah very weak. She is looking anxiously for you. If you get into the cab, I will find your baggage

CHAPTER II.

A N O T H E R.

MONA employed the interval passed in the darkness and solitude of the cab which conveyed her home, in a resolute effort to regain her self-possession. She dreaded to meet grannie's keen, observant eyes; she dreaded, too, the mood which her severe losses would most probably have induced. Mrs. Newburgh, though generally keeping herself well in hand, had her tempers, and Mona became a favourite chiefly because she was not frightened by them. She was far from realizing as yet the total loss which had befallen.

The door was opened by Mrs Newburgh's maid, a very important person, with whom Mona had not unfrequent differences of opinion. Her face was expressive of ill-temper and disgust.

"Mrs. Newburgh has been worriting herself and everyone else because she fancies you are late, miss," was her salutation.

"I do not think I am, Hooper!"

"I daresay not; only you see she is all wrong about time—a minute or an hour, it's all one to her. I never thought you would see her alive. After she read about that cruel, deceitful, swindling company in the paper, she sent off Mr Wehner for Mr. Macquibble. After they had talked a bit, the bell rung sharp; I was called, and there was Mrs. Newburgh in a dead faint. I thought she would never come to. We called the doctor and put her to bed, but she had three more faints before night. Then we telegraphed for you, miss. Nothing would keep her in bed this afternoon—she got up and dressed."

"Poor, dear grannie! I will go to her at once!"

"Won't you have a cup of tea first, miss? you are looking dreadful bad!"

"No, thank you, Hooper!"

She went quickly upstairs to her grandmother's room, and having paused for a second at the door, went in softly.

Mrs. Newburgh sat at a writing-table covered with letters, papers, account and cheque books—some notes and gold at her right hand. She was wrapped in a morning-gown of dark red cashmere, and her grey hair was neatly arranged under her lace cap; but Mona was startled by the ghastliness of her face. Mrs. Newburgh had borne the wear and tear of time well, and having accepted her age without a struggle for youthful appearance, did not look her seventy-six years. Now she might have been a hundred. Her cheeks seemed thinner and more sunken; wrinkles had come about her mouth, the muscles of which were relaxed into a downward curve; her face was

deadly white ; her keen dark eyes were dim and frightened ; her hands which lay on the table were yellow and tremulous. Mona heart thrilled with pity at the sight of such a wreck.

"Oh, grannie !—dear grannie !" was all she could say, coming quickly to her, and gathering up the cold, withered hands into her own, as she kissed her cheek.

The old lady clasped her almost convulsively.

"I thought you would never come," she whispered brokenly. "Do you know that everything is gone ?—everything ! We can't stay here. This is the last money I can call my own"—and she freed one hand to clutch the gold and notes. "I don't seem able to understand the figures or anything ! You will not leave me, Mona Hooper is so cross that"—gathering force by a supreme effort, and speaking with something of her natural decision—"I should in a case dismiss her ; for me all is over. I am too old to struggle any longer. I have fought a brave fight, but Fate is against me. May my child, can you forgive me for losing the little fortune I intended for you ? Somebody told me I ought to draw out of that company—I forget who—I forget all the names ; but I thought I might wait a little longer—the interest was so high—and I have beggared you. Can you forgive ?"

"Forgive you !" cried Mona, sinking on her knees and clasping her arms around her trembling grandmother. "What have I to forgive ? Rather let me pray your forgiveness for my want of obedience and submissiveness ! Where should I be but for you ? I owe you everything ! Send away Hooper—I will be your maid, your nurse, your servant—anything that can help or comfort you !"

"Foolish, hasty child !" murmured Mrs. Newburgh, laying her hand tenderly on the young head pressed against her. "I believe you love me a little."

And the poor, deathlike face brightened for a moment, as the sceptical, worldhardened woman caught a breath of the divine consolation human love alone can give, and which all the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them cannot replace.

"I do love you, dear ! I will do whatever you wish ; and do not be so cast down—something will be arranged for us. We can away and live in the country, then we shall not want expensive dresses, and—"

"You little know !—you little know !" murmured Mrs. Newburgh. "Thank God, I have few debts ! I think I have paid every one intending to go abroad for some months. This has been an expensive year, and there was no time for you to make a good alliance. No time—no time !"

"But, grannie dear, you do not know what prince in disguise may captivate," said Mona, rising and drawing a chair beside her. "Penniless girls marry often."

She would have said anything to cheer her.

"Ay ! but no jewel looks well if it is not well set. Men may not want money with their brides, but they are almost always repulsed by mean surroundings. I see no hope anywhere. None—none !"

There was a long pause. Then Mrs. Newburgh began with an effort to explain how matters stood. It was pitiable to hear how she lost the thread of her narrative and struggled to regain it—how she called people by wrong names, and repeated herself over and over again—insisted on having the money counted out before her, and strove to separate it into different portions. At last she perceived her own inability to convey her meaning, and leant suddenly back in her chair.

"Everything fades from me," she said ; "yet I am not imbecile." "No, no ! dearest grannie ! This confusion is only from physical weakness. Do not try yourself any more. I will write to Mr. Oakley—to your solicitor—to come here to-morrow ; he will put things in order, and tell me what we ought to do. Let me lock up all these papers and the money, and give you some dinner or tea or something. Thinking will do us no good. To-night I will tell you all about Lady Mary and my visit, then I will sit by you till you are asleep. Hooper shall put the chair bed beside yours. I shall sleep here to-night."

"It would be best," murmured Mrs. Newburgh, gladly resigning herself to her grand-daughter's guidance. "I do not want much ; but for you,—ah, Mona ! it is hard ! You must pay Hooper and send her away, and Wehner, too : we want no men-servants now."

The explanations of Mrs. Newburgh's trusty solicitor were indeed a revelation to Mona. The mysteries of the stock market were unfolded to her wondering gaze ; and she learned that besides the considerable sum absolutely paid on the purchase of shares, there was a terrible liability in the shape of "calls" to the full value of these shares ; and as a banking business was connected with the gold mine association, Mrs. Newburgh's whole property was subject to the demands of the depositors, and that she could not call a farthing her own.

The house in Green Street having been bought by her, Mr. Oakley advised Mrs. Newburgh remaining in it till obliged to turn out, as he was rent free. He was most useful in paying and dismissing the servants. The German major-domo, who had been for many years with Mrs. Newburgh, begged to be allowed to remain till his mistress left—without wages ; it was, he said a bad season to find another engagement, and he thought he could be useful to the ladies, even while looking out for a situation, and so he proved himself.

While these changes were going on, Mona was profoundly anxious about her grandmother. At times she was keen, eager, fully alive to what was going on ; then a cloud would gather over her poor brain,

and things seemed to slip from her. She could not bear the sight of her, and was reluctant to let any other relatives see her. When urged by Oakley to acquaint her nephew, Lord Oakley, with the state of her affairs, she asked sharply what he would do?

"He has little enough for himself, and never forgave me for adopting Mona."

"But, my dear madam, some steps must be taken to provide for the future."

"I wish Nature would provide for me," returned Mrs. N. with a deep sigh; "I am a helpless encumbrance now."

"I am sure no one else thinks so," said the solicitor so gently. "Is there not some balance at your bankers that you might draw—say Sir Robert Everard's hand, just to secure some ready money?"

"I will see; I will look into my accounts, but for the present I am too tired to discuss anything further."

Mrs. Newburgh could not, however, complain of any want of interest on the part of her numerous friends and acquaintances. She was overwhelmed with letters of condolence, of inquiries, and most impossible suggestions.

These were generally read aloud by her grand-daughter, and she listened to much of them as she would listen to. Sometimes she would attempt calculations; sometimes she would sit hours deadly silent.

The fourth day after her return home, Mona was as usual sitting with her grandmother, and making out a list of necessities as they might take with them, when two letters arrived by the second delivery. One was from Sir Robert Everard—her cousin of Mrs. Newburgh's—and offered her a cottage which was to be occupied by one of the curates of the parish, suggesting that she might remove some of her furniture there before the crash came, and adding much kindly counsel. The other was from a big, firm but unknown hand. Mona turned to the sign which was "Leslie Waring." She had almost forgotten him in the excitement of the last few days, though the bitter remembrance of Lisle's advice never left her. Every night when she had softly talked her grandmother to sleep, when all was still and she lived over again the fiery ordeal of that conversation, and looked, shuddering, at the dreary, lonely future which she must do battle alone. To whom could she turn, could she lean, when the man who seemed to hang on her whose eyes spoke the warmest devotion, shrunk from her at the mutterings of the storm? But as to when Mr. Waring would declare himself, or whether he ever would, she gave no thought to the momentous question on which she would be called. He stared her in the face, and filled her soul with fear and dis-

"I cannot read this letter to you, grannie; could you read it yourself?"

"Why? What is it?"

"It is marked private, and is, I see, from Mr. Waring; do you remember him?"

"Yes, I do! Give it to me. Where are my glasses?"

Mona sat and watched the haggard, hopeless face, as her grandmother perused the lines, gradually growing less drawn, less desponding, while her own heart sank lower and beat faster.

"Thank God," murmured Mrs. Newburgh at last, heaving a deep sigh as she laid down the letter; "all is not quite lost yet." Mona did not speak. "Mona! read it," she continued; "I suppose you know the contents; read it, I say," repeated Mrs. Newburgh impatiently.

Mona took it and read with nervous rapidity,—

"DEAR MRS. NEWBURGH,—I venture to trouble you with a letter, because I have twice tried in vain to see you or Miss Joscelyn. I feel it is awkward and difficult to approach the subject on which I am about to address you, when I have had so few opportunities of making myself known, but I earnestly hope you will exonerate me from the charge of presumption, and that Miss Joscelyn will not refuse to let me explain myself to her personally. If I dare to be somewhat premature, it is because I believe I might be of some use in the present crisis, were I so fortunate as to be accepted by the lady to whose hand I aspire. Indeed, under any circumstances, I should be proud to be of the smallest service to you, and beg to assure you that I am ready to meet your wishes in all ways. Looking anxiously for your reply, I am, yours faithfully,

"LESLIE WARING."

There was a short silence when Mona ceased.

"A very good letter," said Mrs. Newburgh, with a little gasp, looking with pitiful, imploring eyes at her grandchild.

"I wonder if he composed it himself," observed Mona quietly.

"My child, could you make up your mind to marry this young man? I have noticed his admiration of you. He writes like an honest gentleman. Let me have the comfort of knowing that you have escaped the ills of poverty."

"Oh, grannie, it is a tremendous price to pay for safety! Mr. Waring may be a better man than I deserve; but I do not care for him. He seems to me an awkward big boy—dull and unformed."

Mrs. Newburgh sighed deeply, and closed her eyes.

"I leave it to yourself. I am such a failure, I dare not urge my advice on anyone. I was too urgent with your mother. Do as you will, Mona."

"Oh! what ought I to do?" exclaimed Mona. "It is awful to think spending one's whole life with a man to whom you are indifferent; it is cruel to refuse the only efficient help for you, dear grannie."

"Think of yourself—yourself only ; as for me, I—" her voice grew feeble, her words inarticulate, her head fell back, and Mona's dismay, she became insensible.

All other considerations were forgotten in the efforts to reach her. The faithful Wehner went swiftly for the doctor, who happened to have returned from his morning rounds and came at once.

"It's a bad business these repeated attacks," he said to Mona after he had seen his patient. "Her nerves are all wrong. Her mind *must* be kept at ease somehow. Get her out of this !"

"We expect Sir Robert Everard the day after to-morrow, and then we shall decide what to do," faltered Mona.

"The sooner the better, my dear young lady," returned the doctor, who knew Mrs Newburgh well. "She will go off in one of these attacks, or her mind will become seriously impaired. A woman of her age can hardly stand the shock of such a reverse. Keep her very quiet ; she seems drowsy—the best thing for her is a good sleep ; do not leave her ; she must be watched. I will look in on her evening about seven."

Mona's thoughts were sorely troubled as she kept watch at her grandmother's bedside. She knew that her marriage with Walter—or even the prospect of it, would be the best restorative for her, and that her friend, the woman who had been a mother to her, who had supported and worked to amass the means of independent existence for her, who had loved her after her own hard but tenacious fashion, recalled, with a swelling heart, her grandmother's watchful economy and her self-denial in all things necessary to herself. She did not doubt that any niggardliness towards her grandchild was for her future good. How wise and judicious she had been in her guidance of their lives. If she had shown too strong a tendency to marry her grand-daughter as soon as possible to the highest bidder, she had acted according to her lights—to the creed of her world and her period. Was it well for Mona to refuse the means of giving her a longer and brighter spell of life ? Dare she incur the responsibility of her possible death ? What would she gain—what had she to hope for, in an unmarried life, that she should reject this ? A young man who only asked leave to devote his fortune to her service. With the tendency of youth to believe in the perpetuity of the present, she thought that love with her was over for ever. She could never believe anyone again. She was not angry with Lisl much as disenchanted ; her anger was more against herself, for her weakness and credulity.

A soft tap at the door attracted her attention ; she rose and cautiously opened it.

"Madame Debrisay is below, wanting to speak with you, miss," said the woman who had replaced both cook and housemaid.

"I should like to see her ; could you stay for a little with me while I go down stairs ?"

"Yes'm. I think Mr. Wehner is just come in. I will ask him to answer the door, and come back directly."

Having given a few directions, Mona ran down stairs lightly, well pleased to have a confidential talk with her visitor.

Madame Debrisay had been her greatest friend when she was at school in Paris. There she had been the junior music mistress, and Mona had been immensely attracted by the kindness and good-humour of the hard-working teacher.

When Mona left, Madame Debrisay moved to London, and with Mrs. Newburgh's help contrived to make a good connection as a music and singing mistress. She gave Mona lessons, or rather assisted her in practising for an expensive master, and continued her warmest admirer and devoted friend. Both Madame Debrisay and her late husband the Captain were British subjects, being natives of the Emerald Isle, but she deemed it wise to pose as a foreigner, with a view to obtaining a better position in her profession; and possessing dramatic instincts, she played her part artistically, speaking English with a foreign accent, and even brokenly at times, a proceeding she justified by asserting that the late Debrisay and herself were *really* French, being descended from the Huguenots who had fled from the persecutions of Louis the Fourteenth.

The small fireless dining-room looked so dismal and dark that still November afternoon, that Mona called Wehner to light the gas, that she might see her friend's face.

"Oh! me dear child" (sounded like choild)—her native accent came out when she was much moved, "I have only just come back from the sea side, and heard some bad news, so I ran round to get at the truth from yourself."

"You cannot have heard anything worse than the truth, Deb," returned Mona. "Poor grannie has lost everything. I scarcely know what is to become of us."

"*Dieu des Dieux!* you don't say so. Don't tell me you have to face the black death! for that's what poverty is. There is no misfortune like it, and I know it. Oh, my dear—my jewel, can you see no way out of it?"

"No; no way I should care to try."

"Ha! there is a blink of hope somewhere then? How is your dear good grandmother? How will she ever bear 'going down?'"

"She is very unwell and weak: I am quite frightened about her."

"And no wonder."

Madame Debrisay untied her veil, and sat down with a despondent air. She was a plump woman, under middle height, with dark eyes, iron-grey hair, a decidedly turned-up nose, a wide, smiling mouth, which was rarely quite closed over her beautifully white teeth.

"Tell me all about everything."

And Mona explained as far as her imperfect knowledge permitted. "Those promoters and scamps who get up these companies rob and plunder the world ought to be hung! I know the craft they work. You pay a few pounds on each share, and are swimmingly for a bit, and then you take more, and chuckle over good income they bring in, never doubting that their value will double by-and-by; then comes the crash, and you find all your assets clawed up by those villains—and I'm afraid they will do a clean sweep of poor dear Mrs Newburgh's money, that she is fond of. Not but that she was generous and kind too," Madame Debrisay, hastily correcting herself.

"I am afraid they will! I try hard to think what will become of what I ought to do," returned Mona with a deep sigh. "I fear I am very useless. What can I do to earn money?"

"You earn money! Why, it is hard enough for those who have been trained for work to find the means of existence; and here she found her handkerchief necessary. "That I should hear you speak of such a thing! Not that the work itself is an idle life is the worst of all—it's the looking for it, and the uncertainties, and the waiting. No, my dear, you must make up your mind to marry some nice rich man."

Mona laughed, but her laugh was not merry.

"Dear Deb! you are as imaginative as ever! Nice rich men are plentiful, nor are they ready to marry penniless girls."

"Yes, Englishmen are. And you must not be too hard on them. I remember that night I went to Mrs. Vincent's *soiree musicale* to play the accompaniments, there was a fine, elegant *distinguished* man talking to you and watching you. I asked you about him afterwards, and you would only laugh. You told me his name, but I cannot remember it."

"Mrs. Vincent's party," said Mona, blushing. "There was a crowd of very polite gentlemen there," she added evasively.

How well she remembered that blissful evening—what a triumph to her the mention of it sent through her heart.

"Ay! but this one was more than polite. He was a Captain Lisle, that's it. Now why wouldn't you take him?"

"Because he never asked me for one thing," said Mona, trying to speak lightly and smile carelessly. "I suspect a man who wants a great deal of money, and has very little."

"Oh! he isn't badly off! I know they were talking of his money, of a rich widow who wanted to marry him, and Mrs. Vincent was too independent to be a fortune-hunter—that he had six or seven hundred a year, to say nothing of his pay."

"That is not being rich," returned Mona, trying to be serious, but making a mental note of the fact that Lisle was poor; then a sudden impulse prompted her to confide her doubts to her shrewd, sympathizing friend. "But I am in a pair

ate of mind about a really rich man who has written to my
her asking leave to 'pay his addresses to me,' as old-
people say."

"k God!" exclaimed Madame Debrisay devoutly. "And
, dear?"

ek ago I should have said certainly not! Now," her voice
when I think of poor grannie's wistful eyes when I hesita-
I ought not to refuse! Then she fainted away, as if she
r no more. How can I rob her of her last hope, I, who
so much trouble? And yet, the idea of marrying this
orrible."

as trembled, the long pent-up despair and anguish of her
ild be no longer controlled. Covering her face, she burst
, struggling hard to suppress the bitter sobs which would

, my darlin', is he a monster?" asked Madame Debrisay,

o," said Mona, when she could articulate. "He is a good-
well-meaning young man, rather tiresome and heavy. I
ance with him last season, and he called here a few times.

was staying at the Chase (oh! it was such a pleasant
but he did not seem to notice me much. Then this morn-
a letter from him expressing a wish to marry me."

I blame to him!" ejaculated Madame Debrisay. "And are
sure he is rich?"

aw nothing about it, but grannie seems quite sure."

a fright?"

no. Lady Mary thinks him rather handsome; but I have
quite ugly men I thought better looking."

ask you just one question more; don't think I want to pry
heart, but, do you love anyone else?"

Deb, I do not," said Mona, believing she spoke the truth,
ing her friend's eyes steadily.

, my dear, you marry him out of hand, and turn your back

. That man is the right sort; he stands by you in the
ouble; before a year is out, you will be ready to eat him
y words!"

ould hope to do so!" said Mona, with a deep sigh.

Mona, my dear child! It's better to find love growing
riage than to watch it die out, and rake the ashes together.

id try to keep it alight, and burn up your own heart in
ake this honest soul, and make him happy, and you'll be
rself. A good man is not to be found every day. As for

of poetical, graceful, mutual love young creatures dream
not say it never exists, but it is as scarce as blue roses.

for one heart that can give it, there are a thousand made
stuff. You marry this man, and give your poor dear grand-

mother a bright sunset before she goes. What's his name included Madame Debrissay abruptly.

"Leslie Waring—"

"Hem! I never heard it before—and I hear a lot of go he a new man?"

"I fancy he is, but I know very little about him."

"You are looking ill, very ill, dear. I suppose you never No? I thought not. Now my pupils have not come to t so while I have time I'll come over and stay with Mrs Newt that you may take a little walk; nothing like fresh air for the nerves in tune."

"Thank you very much—and now I am afraid I must go grannie. Have you changed your rooms yet? How h been? I am so selfish about my own troubles that I have t to ask you."

"I am as fresh as the flowers in May. I was dead bes end of the season—but it was a good one—so I went to So stay with the Winklemans. He is bandmaster to one of ments there. She is a sweet little Frenchwoman. I kne Paris. I had a very nice time, and it freshened me up. found very good rooms in Westbourne Villas, and cheaper t I had. I have a big bedroom and a nice parlour. The v the house is a widow, and glad to have a permanent tenant. come to see me, dear, one day?"

"Oh, yes! It is such a comfort to talk to you, and things. You dear, good Deb! All I have told you is a dead

"Of course it is. I know I talk a good deal, but I neve anything I was trusted with. Now God bless you. Mind y me word to-morrow that you have agreed to marry Mr. There's my address. Ain't my new cards pretty?"

CHAPTER III.

YES.

SLEEP partially restored Mrs Newburgh; but next mor grand-daughter observed that she was restless and watchful- ally of herself. The doctor forbade her leaving her bec weather was extremely cold, and a chill might be fatal.

When Mrs Newburgh's *toilette de lit* was made, and her properly arranged, Mona took her work and sat down bes feeling quite sure that her grandmother was making up her speak. This change in the somewhat abrupt, domineering ol touched her—it was such a confession of utter defeat.

"You will be glad to see Sir Robert, grannie," she began will give us some good advice,"

"Not half so good as Mr. Oakley can," returned grannie querulously. "He is a mere country gentleman, and nothing can save me from total ruin. What troubles me is that letter of Mr Waring's. It ought to be answered. I think I could manage to write, if you bring me the large blotting-book."

"Yes, of course, it ought to be answered," returned Mona, very gravely.

"But how?" asked Mrs. Newburgh. "If you refuse to see him, all is over. If you consent, it implies acceptance."

"Not quite, grannie. I have been thinking all night long what I ought to do—what I can do. It seems impossible to decide. I believe I could make up my mind better if I had some conversation with Mr. Waring. I am so indifferent, that I do not think his presence would even confuse me."

"Do see him, Mona; your feelings may be touched when you find yourself face to face with a man who sincerely loves you. And this man has proved his sincerity."

"Or his determination to gratify his whim, cost what it may," added Mona.

"You have no right to impugn his motives. Great as my desire is to see you lifted safe above the bitter flood of poverty, I would not urge you to a repulsive marriage."

"Forgive me, grannie. I am ungracious, selfish. If I marry Mr. Waring, I will do it cheerfully."

She rose and brought the writing materials. "I will see him, but I do not promise to accept him, unless—"

"Let him plead his own cause," interrupted Mrs. Newburgh, stretching out her hand for pen and paper. "He will induce you to take a different view, I am sure." With difficulty she traced a few lines, excusing their brevity on the score of illness, and asking him to call on the following day, when Miss Joscelyn would receive him. "You must address it, dear. He does not know your hand."

"It is of no consequence," said Mona; removing the writing materials; and taking out an envelope, she sat down to direct it.

"It is not natural, Mona, to be so cold and indifferent. Yet I have not detected any liking on your part for any other man, except, indeed—"

"No, no," interrupted Mona quickly. "I have no preference for any one, rest assured, dear grannie."

"Then, Mona, you will love young Waring when he is your husband."

"Oh! yes, I daresay I shall. Now, grannie, I am going to read the paper, try and listen—it may rest your brain a little."

"I will, Mona, I will, because you have given me a little hope."

The rest of the dull, drear November day, Mona moved slowly chafes, but firmly, as if keenly alive to the work she had to do. At side by side with her clear perception of duty and responsibility,

was another sense of coming pain and sacrifice. Were she with only self to provide for, she could launch herself upon ocean of life—fearlessly, if hopelessly. But she must not do her grandmother! and if she could provide for her in no other she was almost bound to provide for her by “accepting service” as she termed it in her own mind—with Mr. Waring. If only was not to be marriage.

Late in the afternoon a card was brought her. “Captain St. Lisle,—th Hussars.” She thought an instant, pencilled a line. “So sorry! I cannot leave Mrs. Newburgh,” and sent it back to This incident was in Waring’s favour.

“I should like to tell him that I am engaged to his *protégé*, we next meet,” she thought. “Yet how base it is to be thus influenced by pique against one man, in my acceptance of another who perhaps really loves me, for I suppose I shall a him. As George Eliot says, ‘One may rave upon the height you know that your persistent self awaits you on the plain, the terrible dead level of necessity to which I am fast sinking. But, or wrong, I will pose to Captain Lisle as a hard-headed world. He shall not pity me, or suspect my contemptible weakness. I shall not fancy he was in such danger of being dragged down by misfortunes that it was necessary to pass me on to someone. Could I have betrayed my feelings so completely, that he should think it necessary to take decided measures for self-defence? how utterly I believed in him. Was I self-deceived, or—but I *not* think any more of myself, and my folly, my contemptible feelings ought to forget self altogether. It is the best way to be happy. Ah! shall I ever be happy again?”

Captain Lisle was not the only visitor to Green Street that late in the afternoon, Sir Robert Everard was announced.

“I cannot see him,” murmured Mrs. Newburgh. “You must, Mona—explain how incapable I feel.”

Sir Robert was a thorough country gentleman. He seemed to bring an atmosphere of the woods and fields with him into the dull dining-room, which had a deserted air. A middle-aged, mis-sized man, plump and rosy, with pepper-and-salt-coloured mustache and chop whiskers, looking always as if he had come fresh from a field. His shirt fronts were the snowiest, his clothes the glossiest, his voice had a mellow ring in it, which atoned for the loud, authoritative in which he usually spoke.

“Well!” he exclaimed, taking Mona’s hand in one of his, patting it with the other, “how is the poor grannie? I thought that I never was more cut up than when I found how desolate she has been swindled! She would stick to the ship, in spite of that Oakley or I could say. The few solvent shareholders got some time ago, and the rest are mostly men of straw, and *not* leave Mrs. Newburgh a rap,”

"Poor dear grannie is very, very miserable, Sir Robert. It is curious that so clever a woman should have believed in what many of her friends and advisers doubted?"

"She was always obstinate, my dear, devilish obstinate! However, I have a bit of good news. A friend of mine wants to buy the house. He will give a decent sum, too; and I want your grandmother to convey the money to me for you, or some legal jugglery of that kind. Go, ask her if she will be able to see me and Oakley to-morrow, that we may settle about it. It will be a something between you and want."

"I will go and tell her," said Mona, hastening away. "Will it be enough to save me from the necessity of marrying anyone?" she thought.

Sir Robert Everard put his hands in his pockets, and paced the room, whistling softly.

"Poor old soul! won't last long, I daresay. The girl will marry; no doubt of that; she is deuced handsome—a well-bred one, too. Would run smooth and easy in double harness. Fellows are cooler and more cautious than they were in my days, but there are plenty of rich ones who might indulge themselves in a handsome, penniless life."

"My grandmother will be glad to see you to-morrow at twelve," said Mona, coming back.

"All right; just sit down and write a line to Oakley, asking him to meet me here. We will have a consultation, then we'll see what is best to be done; we must secure whatever money Mrs. Newburgh gets for the house from the claws of the liquidators. Lady Mary wants her—both of you—to come down to the Chase. I am going to shoot in Rossshire; Eveline comes with me. The other two are going for a month with their aunt to Biarritz; so you will be quite quiet. A change will do your grandmother a lot of good, and set her up again, hey?"

"Thank you so much; it would indeed. I am afraid it will be some time before she can be moved," returned Mona, who shrank from the idea of visiting the Chase again.

"You would be all the better for being turned out to grass yourself, my dear," he resumed kindly. "It's hard lines for a young man like you to be plunged into such trouble. Why, you are not so old as Eveline. I suppose grandmamma is not in the sweetest temper;—a little hard in the mouth just now, eh?"

"Oh, no, Sir Robert; she is an angel. She seems to have lost herself in herself; she has not the force to insist on anything; it breaks my heart to see her so pitifully gentle."

"She must be badly hit. I am awfully sorry for her—for both of you. Just write that, my dear, will you? I'll post it as I go along.

I must leave you now. I am going to dine with Rivers. You remember Rivers who was at the Chase when you were with us?"

Rich old dog—won't spend a penny on anything but they are first-rate. He is a crotchety old sinner ; seld one's house. Lady Mary was rather proud of his st week with us ; but he did not get such dinners in n has in his own."

Sir Robert Everard talked on in his kindly, easy w wrote the note.

Mr. Oakley obeyed the summons. Mrs. Newbur her new hopes, was up and dressed when Sir Robert a arrived. She had, with the help of Wehner's arm, d drawing-room ; but she looked like the ghost of her fo

Then ensued a long, melancholy discussion, at wh burgh insisted her grand-daughter should be pres which the latter gathered that it was of no use endea anything out of the wreck—that whatever the unfc holders possessed must pass into the clutches of creditors ; a call had already been made, and would others, until all was swallowed up. It was therefore prudent for Mrs. Newburgh to reside in the house sh than to move to another for which she would hav Her income had of course been narrowed to a mise: ninety pounds a year, and even on that she could no

"You see, Mona, the condition to which we are Mrs. Newburgh, when their friendly counsellors, w and kindly-expressed sympathy, had withdrawn. asked you to be present at this conference, that you stand the true state of the case. I leave you to drav clusions. No, dear, do not re-open the discussion. own common-sense and right feeling. I am quite ex for Wehner to help me to my room. I can see no or no one—remember, Mona."

Thus cut off from remonstrance, Mona felt she was and Mr. Waring ; grannie was resolved to leave the responsibility—to her.

Mrs. Newburgh had not long returned to her own just taken some refreshment, when Mr. Waring's car A strong feeling of humiliation and disgust rose in the calm indifference of which she boasted the previ her at the moment of trial.

"Do not keep the poor young man waiting," said M

"It is frightful, having to go deliberately to listen marriage !" cried Mona, starting up and walking to t stead of the door.

"I thought you would not mind."

"I *thought* so ; but I will go, dear grannie."

She came back quickly, kissed the old woman's c appeared.

na went rapidly down stairs, and straight into the dining-room, without allowing herself to pause for a moment—half frightened, half angry, at her own faintness of spirit.

Waring stood on the hearth-rug. He was not so tall as Lisle; broad shoulders and rather short neck further diminished his stature. He was built more for strength than grace, and though not fat, it must be admitted, fleshy. His hair was dark, almost black, abundant and wavy, and his broad, good-humoured face was redeemed from absolute plainness by a pair of fine soft dark brown eyes.

He was in general ruddy and fresh-looking, but the excitement, indeed it may be said the terror of the moment, had blanched his cheeks, till he met Mona's eyes, when he blushed furiously.

He hesitated after she had crossed the threshold, and closed the door, standing tall, stately, infinitely sad, in the simplest morning-dress of black silk and cashmere she possessed, a lace scarf wound round her throat with an old-fashioned brooch, her bright hair turned loosely back surmounting her fair pale face like an aureole.

"I am so much, so very much obliged to you for seeing me!" cried Waring, starting forward to take her hand, which he dropped nervously, and dropped immediately. Mona murmured something, he did not hear what, and sat down beside the fire.

Waring resumed his position on the hearth-rug. An awful pause ensued. Mona gazed at the glowing coals, and thought of Lisle's massive voice and perfect, easy self-possession. Waring cudgelled his brain for some suitable phrase to open the dreaded yet longed-for conversation. The result was a restless change of attitude, and words, "Awful nasty weather." His voice was strong and clear. "I hope you took no cold on your journey to town." This was an unlucky allusion.

"Not a cold; I had a slight *chill*," returned Mona, who had some reserve of humour.

He raised her eyes as she spoke, and, meeting his, could not restrain a kindly smile, feeling no little sympathy with his uneasiness and evident sense of difficulty.

"You are amused, I daresay," he cried, his power of speech undeceived by the magic of her smiling eyes; "you *must* be amused, to me blundering like an idiot about the weather, when my heart and mind are filled with hope and fear. Tell me, Miss Joscelyn, Mrs. Newburgh show you my letter?"

"She did."

"And will you—will you let me tell you how awfully I was taken by you the very first time I ever saw you at that Richmond dinner?" Mary Everard gave last year—before you were presented, you remember?"

"Were you there?" asked Mona dreamily.

"That dinner she had first met Lisle. He had not spoken."

her, but she had even then felt a degree of attraction to him, surprised her, and he had remarked her—or—said so.

"Oh, I don't suppose you saw me. I never *can* push. Y Everard and some other fellows were round you all the time; have thought of you ever since. Do you know, last season's were the first I ever went to. I thought they were all rot. the racing set better. I used to go only for the chance of me you—and you would scarcely ever dance with me. To be st am a stupid beggar about dancing."

A pause.

"I think I always gave *some* dances," said Mona, rather at what to reply.

"Oh, you were always civil!" exclaimed Waring, taking a cup from the mantelpiece and turning it round and round examining the pattern. "Not like some girls, who are either ing sweet, or snub you right and left. You are gentle and g I used to think I should never have the pluck to ask you to n me, but—a—you see, when Mrs. Newburgh came to grief, I ashamed of not offering at least to be of use to you."

"And are you content that I should accept you as a refuge the ills of poverty?" asked Mona, looking gravely, calmly at him.

"I am," said Waring, after a minute's pause, putting down cup, and speaking more collectedly. "It's not pleasant, of cou but I have faith in you. If you *promise* to be my wife, you wil to like me, and I'll try to please you with all my soul and witi my strength, as somebody says in the Bible, I think," added W to enforce his professions—his religious studies were slight, somewhat mixed. "And it will go hard if I don't get you to me, unless—unless," his large brown eyes grew imploring—"care for some other fellow! For God's sake, don't say you love other fellow! I never fancied you did."

"I do not indeed." Her tone carried conviction to her hear

"Then—then, Miss Joscelyn, could you make up your mind marry me? I think you might grow to like me by-and-by, and I not say I would be delighted to carry out any plan, *any*," with em sis, "that you think would be best for Mrs. Newburgh's comfor

"It is a tremendous question to answer," said Mona, hesitat yet feeling she must accept him. There was no other way left, she was touched by his unaffected humility. "Yesterday or the before I looked on you as a stranger; to-day I am to decide if I to pass my whole life with you or not. I must say what sou unkind, that I do *not* love you, that if this great misfortune had befallen Mrs. Newburgh, I should probably have refused you—I do not deserve your love!"

"But I cannot help giving it to you! And if you *do* make your mind to take me, you might just let me forget that you driven to it."

es ; I am very ungracious. There is another circumstance I to mention ; you may not like to know that my name is not yn. My grandmother always called me by my second bap- name ; I am really Mona Craig. My father was of very le origin, I believe ; and Mrs. Newburgh never forgave my r for marrying him ; but I dearly loved him as a little child, h I have forgotten what he was like."

don't care what your name is, as long as you will take mine. no great thing as regards family myself. I have heard some- of Mrs. Newburgh's whim before."

is it possible ? "

don't fancy that anything is a secret," said Waring. "Per- it is not fair to press you for an answer to-day. But you see lies, and I long to be able to tell Sir Robert Everard that I a right to discuss with him what is best to be done. Don't ncy that I would hold back because you refused me. Whether y yes or no, I would ask nothing better than to be of use to but not being a relation, it would be awkward for—"

t would be impossible," interrupted Mona, in a low tone ; then ng her clasped hands together tightly, she said with some nity—"Since you believe I could make you happy—"

ou will be my wife ? " interrupted Waring eagerly in his turn. will, Mr. Waring, and try to be a good one." She grew very s she spoke.

ou are a great deal too good for me ; and as you do not care y other fellow, perhaps you may end by caring for me."

re was an awkward pause, then Waring walked over to the g-table and took up a paper-knife with which he played ner-

here are one or two things I should like to tell you, if you do ind ? "

What can he be going to confess ? " thought Mona. She how- nly bent her head in silence.

have not been as steady as I ought to be," resumed Waring, g down and growing red. "You see, my brother and myself brought up by an old bachelor guardian. We had no women house, and that made us rather rough. Then I have lost a bit at cards and races. I'm a little too fond of play, but—now ou are so very good as to promise me your hand, I have an ; to live for, and I will never touch a card again, and never lay ing beyond a pony on a race, and, and I'll try to be not un- y of you. I will indeed ! Now, have I your permission to go ill Sir Robert Everard ? He is a good fellow, and we'll settle hing about Mrs. Newburgh. She ought to get out of town, from annoyances."

Thank you," returned Mona, touched by his eagerness to serve "I am most grateful to you, Mr. Waring."

"Couldn't you manage to call me Leslie?" he said entreatingly. "If you knew how I long to hear my name from your lips! and I call you Mona. It's not a happy enough name for you, but I love it all the same. I can't call you Mona if you say Mr. Waring."

"It seems so strange," murmured Mona.

"Well, never mind to-day; but I may go to Sir Robert?"

"You may," said Mona with white lips.

"Thank you!" cried Waring, his eyes lighting up, his whole face radiant, and so far carried away with joy that he took and kissed her hand, letting it drop directly. "I suppose I ought to go away now!" he said humbly, "but I should like to stay. It is almost impossible to believe that you have really promised to marry me, that I may stay and talk to you, and will not have to give up my place to any one! That fellow Lisle always came and turned me out when we were at Harrowby Chase; but he isn't half bad. Do you know, was he that advised me to try my chance with you?"

"Did you want advising?" said Mona, in an unsteady voice.

"No, not advising, only heartening up! Tell me—would you like to travel on the Continent? I haven't been much abroad myself. Of course I always go to Paris for the Grand Prix, and to the Baden Races—but you?"

"Everything must depend on my grandmother's condition," interrupted Mona. "And, Mr. Waring—if you do not think it very rude—I think I must go to her now."

"You are looking very white," he said tenderly, "so I will leave you; but I hope you are not unhappy, and if there is anything you would wish me to do, you will say so?"

Poor Mona longed to cry.

"I only wish you to go away!" she said, pressing her hand to her heart. "I am a good deal shaken and upset; to-morrow—"

"Oh, yes! I may come to-morrow! And Mona (I may call you Mona, mayn't I?), when you are talking to Mrs. Newburgh, say to her from me that it would be so much better if we—if, that is, if the marriage was to take place soon—quite soon! I should be so much better able to be of use. You'll not think me a bore insisting on this? but it would really be better, putting my feelings quite out of the question."

"I shall be guided by what you and Sir Robert and grannie think best," faltered Mona. "I am afraid I must go now."

"When may I come to-morrow?" asked Waring, lingering.

"Oh! at two or three!"

"Well, I see you are tired, and you'll think kindly of me? I know I would do anything for you, *anything!*"

"Oh, yes, I will! And now good-bye."

Waring caught her hand and looked eagerly at her. For a dread moment her heart fainted within her. Was he going to forsake her? If he had aspired to such a favour, he wisely post-
poned it.

and, again pressing her long, slight fingers to his lips, the room.

ascended the stairs very slowly and deliberately, painfully that she had fully committed herself. It now remained to the sacrifice by assuming a cheerful aspect before her. Then, when she had satisfied her, she might escape to her own thoughts, to face the situation she had ac-

cepted, "Mona?" said Mrs. Newburgh, looking eagerly with her eyes into her grand-daughter's face as she approached, while tremulous hands grasped the arms of her chair nervously. "dear grannie," sitting down by her and taking one of her hands, "I have heard all Mr. Waring had to say, and he promised to marry him."

Mrs. Newburgh did not reply. She pressed Mona's hand, and, leaning back in her chair, the tension of her muscles relaxed, and a look of relief stole over her face.

"You have done well, Mona," she said, after a minute's silence. "I will yet thank me for urging you to this. Yet I did not urge; I only commended you."

"I was all. Mr. Waring and I have been making our confession to him that I was not in love with him, and that had we been with such a reverse of fortune, I should probably have married him; and he told me that he had not been too steady, and that he had not been too prudent."

"You were imprudent, Mona. It is not wise to be too frank with a man you are going to marry. He, no doubt, will overlook you now; but wait till the first cloud comes between you, and it will remind you that you did not care for him."

"Thank Mr. Waring is a man who would forgive anything except a lie, and as I have nothing to hide, I shall try to be absolutely truthful with him."

"It is best; but, Mona, be truthful with me. Are you quite satisfied with any fancy for—*for anyone else?*"

"Perfectly free, dear grannie," this very steadily.

"Thank God!" ejaculated Mrs. Newburgh. "You have always been sensible, cool-headed girl, and I firmly believe you will be a happy, happy woman. Your conduct in this matter has repaid me for all I have done."

"Very sweet to hear you say so," said Mona gently.

"I mean," resumed Mrs. Newburgh, "is Mr. Waring anxious that our marriage should take place soon?"

"Yes; he begged me to say so when speaking to you. He left me to Sir Robert Everard, and consult with him."

"That is well. He is our nearest of kin in town. Do not oppose the young man's desire for a speedy union, Mona. 'There's a nip 'twixt cup and lip.'"

"Young!" repeated Mona dreamily. "He is almost too for me."

"Nonsense!" cried Mrs Newburgh, with something of her briskness. "He must be seven or eight years older than you. What more would you want?"

"He seems a kind of overgrown school-boy—so unfinished and undecided. I feel quite an old woman of the world near him."

"So much the better. The superior ripeness of your nature will give you influence over him. But I do not think he is so much of a boy as you fancy. I know he is a favourite among men, and always is a good sign."

And so on for half-an-hour and more. Mrs. Newburgh was very talkative; she arranged her grand-daughter's future household greatly to her own satisfaction, and settled the amount of pin money she ought to have.

At last Mona was set free to commune with her own heart in her chamber, where she sat very still, reviewing her brief past, and trying to sketch the probable future.

The immediate past was too delightful to be dwelt upon, yet it had been a delusion. She had grown to believe that she was an object of tender interest, of admiration bordering on adoration, to a man of wide experience, of acknowledged taste, and behold, his momentary showing sympathy with her in her sudden eclipse was to pass to another. She had been but a moment's amusement to this man, and she—it shocked and frightened her to perceive how dear he had become. No doubt, in her inexperience, she had exaggerated, and accepted many things as meaning more than he intended. She was too proud to complain of him even to herself; all she cared was to hide the depth of the impression he had stamped upon her heart—to make him believe that she too had but amused him, and that she was quite ready to seize an advantageous opportunity to get rid of him. She was not revengeful or resentful, only ground to the dust of her abasement, and ready to adopt any expedient to hide her grief and bleeding wounds! Then, as to the future, was it right or high to be ciplined to seize upon the honest, generous affection of Leslie Waring and turn it into a shield behind which to hide her total rout? What thought she could bear everything, if only *this* ingredient could be eliminated from the witches' cauldron of mischief which had outpoured on her unoffending head. He *was* an honest gentle man, she could have liked him well as a friend or a brother—but as a lover? The idea was almost intolerable! How could she have loved and obey a mere boy, to whom she felt infinitely superior in taste and knowledge? What support or guidance could he afford her? What she was pledged to him; she must not fail him; she was still profoundly pledged to her kind grandmother. Like the Roman, who was unable to pay his debts, she could but sell herself into slavery. **Not that poor Leslie Waring would make a slave of her; he**

asked to enslave himself. How was she to live through the weary interval of her engagement? How could she brace herself to affect an interest in life? And then the recollection of his appealing look at parting made her cheek grow pale and her heart beat. Could she again refuse him the kiss he would certainly ask?—the man she had promised to marry, to love and cherish till death “did them part.” She shuddered, and turned from the thought, leaving the future—its sufferings, its obligations—to the chapter of accidents, as poor puzzled mortals so often must.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE BRINK.

ST. JOHN LISLE had not, however, come off as scathless as Mona imagined. He had never been so hard hit by a girl before. His taste and ambitions led him to bestow his devotion generally on married women, as easier, safer, and more amusing. Hitherto his love had been from his life a thing “exceedingly apart.” Mona’s ordinary reserve, broken by occasional gleams of enthusiasm and earnestness, interested him, by the constant suggestion of discoveries yet to make; while her style of face and figure were delightful to his eye. In short, her attraction was irresistible; he was angry with himself for yielding to it as he did—for marriage, even the most brilliant marriage, would not suit his views and plans for years to come. Still it grew more and more delightful to be with Mona, to watch for the slight, reluctantly-granted indications of preference which he from time to time won from her; nothing ever flattered him so deliciously as the first drooping of her white eyelids over the proud, steady eyes that had for months met his gaze so calmly; the slight tremble of her hand as it lay in his; the sweet composure which veiled what he perceived from all the world. He was absurdly occupied with this quiet, inexperienced girl, who was so womanly, though so young. She cost him some uncomfortable moments too; still he never so lost his head as to think seriously of marriage. Years hence, when he had attained a high position, and wanted a dignified, well-regulated home, he might look out for a richly-dowered, highly-connected wife. Now, Mona, though well born, on one side at least, was for all purposes of advancement the merest nobody; yet what a disturbing influence she exercised on his heart or circulation, or whatever it was that throbbed in his pulses, and prompted him to unpleasant spasms of imprudence! All this irritation had reached its highest pitch during his visit to Harrowby Chase; and so softened was the cool-headed man of the world, that, when the blow fell on Mrs Newburgh, which he knew

meant life long poverty to Mona were she not soon rescued, he thought how he could best serve her, after he had considered he could soonest disentangle himself from the meshes which he were weaving themselves round him in the pleasant, free course of county-house life.

He therefore caught eagerly at Leslie Waring's proposition resolved that no allusions about himself should interfere to prevent Mona accepting the deliverance offered to her.

Resolute as he was, both by nature and cultivation, he half-dreaded the interview he had planned so cunningly. He expected agitation, despair, however she might seek to hide their real sorrow. He even anticipated some delightful moments. When sympathy in her distress, and deploring the exigency of his own narrow circumstances, he might offer consolation in a tender embrace, a few—perhaps a good many—passionate kisses.

Her mode of receiving his communication amazed him. He did not know what to think. He felt almost sure that she loved him, and even more sure that at the present stage of her existence she was unworldly, and remarkably indifferent to rank and riches. He could not understand how it was that she fell in so readily with his suggestion, and was, in truth, mortified in no small degree, when he found that the elaborate scheme of soothing caresses and ingenuously reasoning he had prepared, was so much trouble wasted. If she cared for him, she could not be so good humouredly composed; some stinging words would have escaped her lips, some indication of the rage and pain that must be gnawing her heart would have been visible.

He was absurdly anxious to see her again—to ascertain if she kept up the same friendly ease which had baffled him. Meanwhile he waited in London while his uncle was engaged in arranging the military details of his new command. It would be much better to go out to India free and unfettered, to know he was unable to reproach him. Still, an odd sorness surrounded the image, which was so deeply stamped upon his mind. He was determined to see her again.

A few days after having called in vain at Mrs. Newburgh's, he had been breakfasting with General Stafford, and had remained some time discussing plans. Walking down Piccadilly to his house, he found himself face to face with Sir Robert Everard.

"Ha, Lisle! did not know you were in town!" cried the Baron.

"And I did not expect to see you at this season, too!"

"I was obliged to come up on account of Mrs. Newburgh's illness. They won't leave the old woman a rap. First call made yesterday—fifty pounds a share. That will pretty well clear her. Very foolish to have gone so deep as she did. However, all's that ends well, Leslie Waring has proposed to Miss Joscelyne. And I can tell you, "Haste to the Wedding" is the

ha, ha !—most lucky. Capital fellow, Waring ! going to
ing handsomely ; but he and the grandmother are in such
f a hurry that he has decided on a post-nuptial settlement,
7 the marriage will come off in a week or so—no grass grow-
ed."

glad to hear it. Miss Joscelyn is far too charming a per-
son subjected to the revolting ills of poverty. Waring is a
low to be able to seize what is no doubt a fortunate oppor-

the fair lady might have given a different answer had this
come. No matter, Mona was always a good, quiet girl—
re domesticated sort, that will stick to her house and her

mewhat cat-like character," said Lisle, laughing. "To me,
celyn is an ideal woman."

spect a little ideal goes a long way with you."

I am a more imaginative person than you think. I must
offer my congratulations."

l, you had better look in for tea. Mrs. Newburgh comes
en the house is shut up, and the lights are lit—then you
errupt the billing and cooing, ha, ha, ha ! Good-bye."

l-meaning old idiot," muttered Lisle, as he went on his way
t brows. "'The billing and cooing,'—how infernally sug-

I will just drop in at that particular period, and see if I
pret the indications aright."

was, however, too impatient to calculate time accurately,
a was talking with a lady when he was announced. A dark-
l-dressed lady, in black cashmere, and bugles with many
of yellow in tufts of ribbon, and chrysanthemums in her
enlivening the whole.

had a slight colour, and looked remarkably well. She re-
sile with quiet civility, and immediately introduced him to
ne Debrisay." Lisle bowed low, while he mentally con-
ie objectionable third party to the infernal regions. Mad-
risay looked very keenly at him, and closed her lips with
tightness.

g inquired tenderly for Mrs. Newburgh, Lisle said, in a soft

esume, from what Sir Robert Everard told me, I may ven-
ffer my very sincere congratulations on your approaching
with my good friend Leslie."

nk you very much," returned Mona, with sweet gravity.

was a pause—mercifully broken by Madame Debrisay, who,
arked French accent, observed,—

s most amiable, the young gentleman, and deserves the good
which has befallen him."

is concerned in affairs of this kind are usually consider-

angels all round," said Lisle cynically. "In this case, I only feel inclined to believe in the angelic qualities of one. May I hope to have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Newburgh?"

"She rarely comes down till past three. I will let her know you are here; you were always a favourite of hers."

Mona rang, and sent a message to Mrs. Newburgh to that effect then Madame Debrisay began to make her adieux.

"I ought not to take up any more of your time, *cherie*."

"Pray do not go away yet," cried Mona, with suspicious eagerness.

"She does not want to be alone with me," thought Lisle. "Why does not that horrid woman go? She must know she is in the way."

"Indeed, dear, I have one or two things to do before I go home for next week I shall be in harness again; but I will be with you by ten o'clock to-morrow. Nothing like the early hours for shopping and make my compliments to—"

"Mr. Waring," announced Wehner, and Waring entered, with an eager, not to say anxious, expression, as if not too certain how he would be received.

Madame Debrisay, who was near the door, made him a respectful courtesy, and he greeted her first.

"How do you do, madame? Not going, I hope, because I have come in."

Here he paused, for Mona turned to him with a kind, welcoming smile, so much the sweetest she had ever bestowed on him, that he grew positively radiant, and evidently forgot there was anyone else present. Lisle took it all in, and gazed with surprise and admiration at Mona. If this was acting, it was a marvellous imitation of nature; if not, what a weather-cock this grave, gently-dignified young creature must be!

"I think grannie would like to see you," said Mona, following Madame Debrisay. "Excuse me for a moment," looking back at her visitors. "Oh! why do you go, Deb? I dread these *tete-a-tete* interviews."

"But Captain Lisle is a third, dear."

"Oh, he will go away directly."

"Ah! my child, don't give way to these whims. Sure you'll not pass your whole life *tete-a-tete* with him; and he is good—downright good. Make much of him. Go back now, and I'll not fail to be with you to-morrow at ten."

At the other side of the door, Lisle was congratulating Waring in the frankest and most cordial manner.

"I consider a great deal is due to me for spiriting you up, my fellow. Nothing venture, nothing have—so you won a prize man might be proud of."

"Haven't I though! I went to the right man for advice."

"*He, won't you be my best man?*"

"I'm afraid I'll be half way to India when the happy event comes off."

"Oh ! we are going ahead at a great rate. We—or I should say I—hope to fix it for Tuesday fortnight."

"Sharp work, eh ?"

Here Mona returned.

"I do not think my grandmother will come down just yet, Captain Lisle."

"Sorry I shall not have the pleasure of seeing her. I shall be going to India in about six weeks, and I have to go to Paris to see my sister, etc., etc." The talk flowed on in ordinary channels for a few minutes, and then Lisle rose to take leave. "Should I not see you again as Miss Joscelyn," he said, as he pressed her hand "you will remember that you have my warmest good wishes for your happiness. I shall pay my respects to Mrs. Newburgh on my return to London ; so good-bye."

Mona flushed, and paled quickly.

"And I wish you all possible success ; so good-bye," she said slowly.

Waring, in his gratitude, went with him down stairs, and bid him an effusive farewell at the hall door, returning in high glee to Mona, who was putting some more coal on the fire.

"Oh, let me do that. Why do you trouble ? Isn't the room hot enough ?"

"Grannie will be down soon, and she never finds it warm."

"Not just yet, I hope. Somehow or other I never seem to get a moment alone with you, Mona. I was glad to see the back of Lisle, though he is a capital fellow. I don't know that I like any fellow better ; but I was dying to tell you how happy you made me just now when I came in ; you really looked as if you were glad to see me. If I thought you were going to be fond of me, even half as fond of me as I am of you, why, I should be almost off my head with joy."

"You are too good to me," she returned sadly, for his words and tone touched her.

"I know," he went on, "that you do not care much for me now, but I begin to hope you will. Give me your hand ; how long and slender it is ! You could not do much with it, Mona. Why do you draw it away ? Hello ! your ring has slipped off ! I don't like that. Let me put it on again. Now, give me a kiss for luck ; you have never given me but one kiss, and I have dreamed of it ever since—just one more, Mona !"

And Mona—shocked at her own reluctance, ashamed of her own coldness towards the man who had given her his whole heart—compelled herself to turn her pale, fair face to him.

Clasping her hand in both his own, Waring bent down and pressed his lips lingeringly on hers. He scarcely dared to embrace her. His frame trembled ; his eyes were moist.

"Say Leslie, I will try to love you," he whispered.
 "I will try—I will indeed, Leslie," she repeated. "I have been so uneasy and unhappy about poor grannie; and I never thought of marrying so soon; and altogether I have been shaken and nervous—so you must forgive me if I seem stupid."

"Stupid! You stupid! What an idea!"

Meanwhile Lisle walked down the street in anything but pleasant self-commune.

"I certainly troubled myself unnecessarily about my charming young friend. She has thrown me over easily enough; she must think me a soft idiot to have troubled myself advising or directing her. Were I to remain in town, I might teach Mrs. Leslie Waring that I was no foolish stripling, to be tossed aside with indifference and impunity when fate offered her fairer fortune! She knows that it cost me a bad quarter of an hour to give her up for her own good. Who can calculate on the strange variations of feminine nature?"

So argued Lisle, with the degree of logic usual in men whose vanity has been wounded. He was quite willing that Mona should be taken out of his way, but he should have liked to see her weeping—broken-hearted at the loss of his fascinating self. Yet, although horribly irritated, he probably never longed more passionately to be in Waring's place—always provided the engagement, marriage, or what you will, was not to be permanent.

Both Mrs. Newburgh and Sir Robert Everard were very urgent that the wedding should take place as soon as possible. Waring, though eager on this point, was too fearful of incurring Mona's displeasure to express himself as warmly as he felt. It was always, "What would *you* like, Mona?" "Whatever you choose, dear!" This excessive deference to her wishes almost wearied her. In her present mood she did not care to think or decide about anything. Nor did she oppose the wishes of her relatives. She had fully committed herself; perhaps the sooner the question of her future was fixed beyond recall, the sooner she would throw off the disturbing pain which the possibility of escape created, so long as she was still unmarried. Moreover, she hated to receive the presents with which Leslie Waring tried to overwhelm her. It cost her an effort to thank him, and still another to explain that it would be more pleasing to her to take them from her husband's hands.

She was completely cured of her love for the man St. John Li had proved himself to be; but both heart and fancy clung still to the being her imagination had depicted. It was too soon to end the thought of another lover. Had time been granted her for the effervescence of her spirit to subside—for her cruel wounds to heal—she might have been won to regard Waring with kindly affection as it was, her whole nature revolted from being forcibly plunged into the tremendous intimacy of married life with a stranger.

This period of engagement was by no means as blissful as Waring anticipated. Mona, though gentle and complaisant, was colder than she knew—and Waring was sometimes tempted to ask if the sacrifice to which she had consented was too cruel. Then the strain of compassion would steal over her heart, and thrill her ice or soften her eyes, and the poor boy—for he was but a boy, in spite of his years—would be lifted to the seventh heaven of joyous anticipation. He had the most unbounded faith in Mona, and he had her assurance that she did not love anyone. His devotion, then, must win her. How formidable the rivalry of that first unfulfilled dream of love was, he could not know. Would he learn it hereafter?

"Well, Mrs. Newburgh," said Sir Robert Everard, who had again come up to town on his relative's account, "I am very glad at everything is so satisfactorily settled. I must say Mona is a pitiful, sensible girl, and makes no fuss or bother about clothes. Waring's idea of doing their shopping together in Paris is first rate. He will sign a will in his wife's favour as soon as they return from church; and meantime the post-nuptial settlement is being prepared. Really, Waring is most generous. What are you going to do?"

"I am going to stay on here. I think my poor house is tolerably comfortable for a few months. Mr. Waring talks of renting a place in some good hunting county—indeed, I think he is in treaty for one—and he has very courteously invited me to make my home with him. For the present, I have accepted. So old a woman as I have become in the last month, cannot be much in the way, and probably I shall not trouble them long. Though infinitely relieved, and thankful that Mona is provided for so happily, I do not gather strength. These terrible palpitations and faintness seem to sap my life; but I am not uneasy; my work is done—quite done!"

"Come, come! I hope to drink your health on your eightieth birthday, my dear lady! we must have no doleful ideas of that kind. The happy day is fixed for the first. Lady Mary and the girls will come up the day before, and that will be all the company."

"Yes, all! It is very good of you to curtail your visit to the moors on our account."

"Blood is thicker than water," returned Sir Robert, and after a little further cheerful talk and gossip, which did not seem to interest Mrs. Newburgh as much as it used, the Baronet took leave.

"Your mistress does not pick up as fast as we could wish," he said to Wehner, who helped him on with his overcoat in the hall.

"No, Sir Robert. She is not strong; she is very weak—weaker each day. It grieves me to the heart."

"Ay! she is a good mistress. Now you will be sent adrift before long, I am afraid."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'll bear you in mind."

"Thank you, Sir Robert."

This conversation had taken place when Mona was engaged in some unavoidable shopping with Madame Debrisay. Having done all they could before the light failed them, Mona begged to be allowed to take tea with her friend.

"You know I have never seen your new rooms, Deb."

"Then come, and welcome. We will go into Whiteley's and get some tea-cakes. Tea-cakes are, to my mind—or maybe I ought to say to my palate—the *ne plus ultra* of goody! I suppose Mrs. Newburgh will not mind your being late?"

"No; she knows I am with you; besides, Sir Robert Everard is to be in town to-day, and she likes to have his visits all to herself. They have many memories in common—though he is much younger."

"And, Mr. Waring?"

"He has gone down to Leicestershire to look at a place that is to be let there."

"Well, well, you are the lucky girl, Mona!"

"I suppose so."

They drove on in silence to the Universal Provider's, and thence walked to Madame Debrisay's new quarters.

"How nice and quiet it is here!" cried Mona, taking off her hat and drawing a chair to the fire, which Madame Debrisay stirred and incited to burning, with some sticks drawn from a cupboard beside the fireplace. "Quite a good-sized room too; but, Deb, dear, it might be tidier!"

"So it might; but, *ma belle*, I have no time; and what does the poor slave of a girl know of tidiness? besides, if she tried her hand, I'd never find my bits of things."

Mona's remark was not uncalled for. The apartment was sadly littered. A cottage piano had an old Indian shawl arranged as a drapery at the back, one side of which was unfastened; piles of music lay on it, and on a broken-backed chair; a heap of crumpled newspapers on another; a small round table was crowded with plants, many of them withered; and sundry garments in process of mending or making were loosely rolled together on the ottoman. This, and a generally undusted aspect, did not improve the appearance of the room. It was on the ground floor, and looked out on a general garden, which at that season was anything but cheerful.

"I have an elegant bedroom to the front," resumed Madame Debrisay. "Come and look at it." Passing a glass door at the top of the kitchen stair, she opened it, and called—"Amelia, bring me the tea kettle; I'll boil it myself." "It's a great convenience being able to cry down for what you want. Now, there's my bedroom. I am afraid it is not in much better order than the other."

"I can't say that it is, Deb, but it is nearly as large as the other. I wonder you do not make this your salon. The lookout is not cheerful."

"I am not much in by daylight. Then you see the other room has a fine white marble chimney-piece. It was intended for the drawing-room. These houses used to be expensive, but they have come down like myself. Come along, and I'll make the tea."

"I think," said Mona presently, as she slowly stirred her cup, "it would be nice to do some of the housework oneself."

"I suspect a little of it would go a long way with you. It's little work you'll have to do. There's an easy life before—"

"To sit on a cushion and sew up a seam, and eat ripe strawberries, sugar, and cream, all day long, is not exactly my idea of a blissful existence," said Mona.

"Now, my darling, I am going to give you a good scolding. You are looking pale and thin, and your eyes are as solemn as if you were going to a funeral. Is that the way to treat the dear, generous, elegant young man who's ready to worship the ground you walk on? What is it you want? I did not think you were the sort of girl who would cry for the moon."

"Nor am I," returned Mona thoughtfully. "I know, Deb, that Mr. Waring is too good for me—"

"I don't say that. No one on earth is too good for you, in my mind," interrupted Madame Debrisay.

"But—let me confess myself to you. I would give *anything*—anything not to be obliged to marry him. It is foolish, unreasonable. I know it is. Yet I have such a vision of weariness before me. I know I shall be sick to death of being with him. I never know what to say to him."

"I warrant he knows what to say to *you*!" cried Madame.

"No! indeed he does not! He can only tell me I am perfection, and that he adores me."

"It's a style of conversation few young ladies would object to."

"Well I do. Yet I am so sorry for him. Poor fellow, he *does* love me."

"Ah! well you see some of that will rub off when he is married. A lover is one thing, and husband is quite another. Then oughten ed you to be glad to make a human being happy?"

"Shall I make him happy? I doubt it. Oh, Deb, Deb! I would give the world for freedom and work. I am tired of pleasure and an aimless existence."

"*Dieu des dieux!* Does that mean you are in love with some penniless scamp?"

"No, dear. At least I am guiltless of marrying one man while my heart aches for another."

"Then there is something underneath I do not understand. If you don't care for anyone else all will come right. You talk to me a year hence, and you'll have a different story to tell. Now, I'll not speak another word on the subject. I hate talking of what I don't understand. Take another cup, my angel."

For all reply, Mona burst into tears, not a violent outburst, but a quietly bitter flow, with deep suppressed sobs.

"My dear child ! what's all this about ?" cried Madame Debrisay with unfeigned concern. "What's troubling you ? Sure, you used to tell me all your sorrows when you used to come to me for your music lesson in Paris. Tell me now."

"I really have nothing to tell," said Mona, struggling with her tears. "It is just a nervous attack—a 'crise,' as you used to call it. I have felt tearful and unstrung ever since I was startled by grannie's telegram at Harrowby Chase, and I have been on the stretch ever since. I suppose it sounds very foolish, Deb, but I wish I could come and live with you, and help you in some way rather than—"

"Oh ! hush—hush—my darling. You are meant for better things. There's no one would be so welcome as yourself ; but there is a different life before you."

"Should I really be welcome to you, Deb, suppose everyone turned from me ?"

"Hoot toot ! Yes, of course. Come, --I must not let you talk any more nonsense. I'll make the girl call a cab, and take you straight away home."

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT KING.

TIME flew swiftly. A red frosty sun, rose on the morning before Mona was to be changed into Mrs. Leslie Waring.

She had been persuaded to sleep in her own room again, as Mrs. Newburgh seemed so much better, and quite reconciled to a new maid—sent her from the country by Lady Mary Everard.

"How is my grandmother ?" was Mona's first question, when this functionary brought her hot water.

"Nicely, miss ; she was fast asleep when I left the room."

"I will ring as soon as I am dressed. Did you speak to Mrs. Newburgh ?"

"No, miss ; she looked so still and quiet, I thought it best to disturb her."

"Perhaps you are right ! I will come directly."

Mrs. Newburgh's eyes were open when her grand-daughter proached, she smiled, kindly and faintly. When Mona asked her she would like to get up, she smiled a peculiar dreamy kind of smile and murmured in a muffled voice—

"Yes, dear, of course I should."

Mona therefore put her arm under her shoulders to help rising, which was always a little difficult.

"Thank you, my love," she said, in the same indistinct way, smiling as she spoke, and sitting on the side of the bed; her feet did not at first touch the floor.

Assisted by Mona, she put them down resolutely, but fell back immediately, silent and motionless.

It took all Mona's strength to keep her inert form from slipping off the bed, while she stretched her hand to the bell-rope which hung beside it. The new lady's-maid came running at the summons.

"Help me to lay her down!" whispered Mona.

She felt terrified; this was somehow different from Mrs. Newburgh's usual fainting fits.

The maid assisted to place her in bed. She was rigid, and very heavy.

"Fan her, Ellen," said Mona, as she turned away to get some restorative.

"Lord bless us, ma'am!" exclaimed the woman, in an awe-struck tone; "I do believe she is gone!"

"Impossible!" cried Mona, rushing to her side. "Why she has only just been speaking to me. She often faints; send for the doctor."

"Ah! no doctor will do her any good, poor lady; her heart is quite still," laying her hand on it, "and her eyes—just look at them, miss—open and glassy."

Mona took one of the helpless hands in both her own: the touch chilled her.

"I cannot believe it. Try and give her this," hastily measuring out the prescribed quantity of medicine.

Ellen shook her head—and obeyed. It was in vain. Wehner was despatched for the doctor, but before he came—Mona's hopes were over. Her grandmother, her one real friend was dead. She could not doubt what that grey pallor, the deadly stillness, the stiffened form meant—still she could not realize that she should never hear her speak, never turn to her for guidance, never attend to her little wants again.

The doctor came quickly, and at once declared that life was quite extinct—that he had always anticipated a sudden death for his patient. Her heart was weak, and so much emotion as had tried her of late, had rendered all exertion, all agitation, dangerous; and probably the effort to rise, and stand up, was the final feather which broke the strained cord of life.

There was no more to be done! What desolation there is in that sentence. All the warmth of the most glowing love, all the force of the strongest will, are powerless to roll away the stone from the sepulchre of our hopes, once death has placed it there!

It seemed to poor dazed Mona that Sir Robert and Lady Mary Everard appeared as if by magic. What a solace it was to throw herself into kind Lady Mary's arms, and tell her brokenly how

deeply she mourned the thoughtful—if tyrannical protector whom misfortune had linked her so closely.

"Well, dear, you may rest assured that the near prospect of marriage soothed and brightened her last hours; and it is comfort to know she was in a happy frame of mind. Sir Robert sent round to Mr. Waring. He will be here immediately, and will be your best support."

"Oh! no, no! You are best. You knew poor dear grandmother, and she was so fond of you."

"Dear old lady! Of course, at such a painful crisis, old people count for a great deal. I think, dear, you must come back to Charles Street. I cannot leave you here alone."

"No, Lady Mary, I will not leave the house while poor grandmother lies helpless here. I feel bound to keep by her to the last."

A message from Sir Robert brought Waring as fast as a driver could urge his horse. He was quite sorry for the man who had always treated him with kindly deference. He was sympathetic with his peerless Mona, but he was principally because he knew that in commonest decency his marriage was delayed. Mona was not in the drawing-room when he reached it, and he was somewhat discomfited when Lady Mary came to explain that Mona was too much overcome to see him—that she was in her own room.

"But she will see me presently, will she not?" he asked anxiously. "I thought it might be a comfort to her to talk to me."

"No doubt it will be. At this moment she is terribly unwell. It was not till considerably later—after Waring and Sir Robert had arranged the details of the funeral, and all that appertained to it—that Mona was induced to see her affianced husband."

Lady Mary thought it was kindest to leave them alone, and poor Waring thanked her from the depths of his heart. His interview was productive of little pleasure to him.

Mona was ready enough to speak of her sorrow. She was grateful for his sympathy, but she would not sit beside him with her head on his shoulder, and his arm round her, nor did she like the course of consolation compounded of whispers, kisses, and assurances that the whisperer would be brother and sister or mother and everything to her. She was so dazed and fevered that Waring was gravely uneasy about her, and it was an relief to him to know that Madame Delorsay (who had been a sad event in some occult manner) was in the house, and would spend the night with her favourite pupil.

Established custom governs all things—the deepest grief is the wildest joy. The dreary days—which lingered yet went on—passed on, and poor Mrs. Neatbush was laid in her grave, leaving all she possessed to Mona, who daily re-
 ceived

jewels and personalities packed up. The former went with Mona to Harrowby Chase. Her books, her favourite chair, a few pieces of plate and china, were taken charge of by Madame Debrisay, and the Green Street house, pending the action of the liquidators, was to be let.

Mona took cold on her journey, and for a fortnight was very unwell—so feverish, in fact, as to wander in her speech, and to cause her kind hosts a good deal of anxiety. Her nerves had been greatly shaken; she was weaker and more depressed than could have been anticipated. She was very averse to speak, and used to sit brooding for hours.

She was utterly lonely. She had no near relative. The Everards were more closely allied by friendship than by blood to Mrs. Newburgh. She had heard of many other cousins in her grandmother's lifetime, but she felt they did not count. Of Lord Sunderline, her nearest of kin, she knew but very little, nor was that little attractive.

Pondering these things, she grew affrighted at the stern aspect of the world she was going to face, for as she collected her faculties and studied her circumstances, she grew more and more averse to fulfil her engagement with Leslie Waring. The great motive was gone, and an irresistible longing for freedom, however poverty stricken, seized her. The idea of so close a union with a mere good-natured sportsman, who in no way touched her imagination, whose offensive affection wearied her, whose personal appearance was unpleasant to her eye, became infinitely repugnant as she dwelt upon it. It was hardly fair to him either to let him plunge into the irrevocable in ignorance of her aversion. Better let him bear a temporary pang now, than incur the misery long drawn out of an ill-assorted, unsympathetic marriage.

Her resolution to break with him grew rapidly stronger almost before she was aware she had formed it. Then she began to see that she was enjoying Lady Mary's kind hospitality under false pretences. She did not for a moment doubt that her refusal to marry Waring would bring down, if not a storm of wrath—for Lady Mary and her family were far too well-bred to be violently angry—but an iceberg of disapprobation. She must remove herself from the shelter of their roof before she struck the blow that would give poor Waring so much temporary pain. (She felt sure it would be but temporary.) And where could she go? There was no one but her faithful Madame Debrisay on whom she could count, and even she would be very very angry. Still her purpose grew clearer and firmer as her nervous system began to recover the shock it had sustained.

"Pray, dear, did poor Mrs. Newburgh leave any ready money?" asked Lady Mary, coming into her husband's dressing-room, where he was occupied with his toilette, after a sharp and satisfactory run with the *Daleshire hounds*.

"Yes ; a few hundreds, which she put in my hands to meet immediate expenses. Why do you ask ?"

"Oh, Mona told me to ask you ! She came down stairs to luncheon to-day, looking very white and miserable, poor child ; she seems restless, and anxious to go out of the way of our Christmas gathering. She proposes to spend a short time with Madame Debrisay—a very respectable person ; she gave Evelyn music lessons, and—"

"Why the deuce doesn't she marry Waring straight off, and go away with him ? that's the sort of change that would set her up."

"Well, you see, she feels it would be indecently soon after her grandmother's death."

"Pooh ! nonsense ! Why, nothing would please the old lady so much, even if she were in heaven, as to know the knot was absolutely tied ! You make her hear reason. Let us send for Waring ; she has her wedding-gown, and we will marry them next week."

"I wish I could," ejaculated Lady Mary.

"By the way, what has become of Waring ?"

"He has gone to see his old guardian about some business ; to pass away the time, I fancy, till Mona is well enough to see him. He was quite distracted about her at first, poor fellow. I really do not think she is half as grateful to him as she ought to be."

"No ; I daresay not—it would be unfeminine ! But he ought not to put up with such rubbish. Who is this woman she wants to go to ?"

"I told you, my dear. She is a professor of music, well known to us all."

"Well, you ought to ascertain what Waring thinks about it—he has a right to be consulted."

"I do not think he would object. Then he could stay in London and see her every day ; whereas a man so much in love is rather a nuisance in a house."

"Oh, manage it your own way ! Marry them out of hand if you can. Perhaps it might be as well to let her go ; for I want a really nice party to meet Lord Finistoun, who is a capital fellow, and it is his first visit here. Mind you, I don't think Mona is treating Waring well ; you ought to influence her."

"That is not so easily done. She has some of the Newbury blood, you know, and thinks she knows her own mind."

"Bah ! I thought better of Mona."

The jovial country gentleman was too much occupied with pleasures and affairs to trouble about feminine crochets—all this was Lady Mary's work.

Meantime, Mona had not been idle. She wrote to her "dear Deb," begging leave to visit her, as she felt herself an impediment to the party Lady Mary wished to assemble, and also because she had more to say than she could write.

This brought a speedy, rapturous reply.

Then Mona applied herself to compose, re-write, and copy her difficult letter to Leslie Waring.

It was even a worse task than she anticipated. All her selfish longing for deliverance was for the moment swallowed up in sorrow for the pain she was about to inflict. Nothing kept her steady to her purpose so much as her conviction that she was doing right—that she was delivering Leslie as well as herself. She was more than one day over her task; for Evelyn Everard, an exceedingly girlish girl, who had taken a violent fancy to her, was constantly running into her room with her work, or book, or for the avowed intention of “enlivening” her.

It was accomplished at last, however; but Mona waited to post it till she was safe in town, even though she left two of Waring's epistles unanswered. Indeed, her replies had always been few and scanty—so much so, that even he had become restless and dissatisfied. He hoped, however, that a personal interview would put all matters right. Mona had had so severe a shock in the sudden death of her grandmother in her very arms, that she must be shown all patience and consideration.

It was with a nervous sense of guilt, of being a deceiver, that Mona took leave of Lady Mary and her daughters. She took advantage of the Vicar's wife's company, as she was going to town for a rare visit, and she thus avoided the cost and worry of having a smart lady's-maid sent with her.

It was a grey blustering afternoon when she reached St Pancras, and found Madame Debrisay waiting for her.

“My dear, you *do* look bad! Come, get into the cab. I will find your things.”

“I have only this small portmanteau and bonnet-box for the present.”

“That's right. I am sure you are not fit to be out in such weather; get in, dear.”

“I must post this letter first,” said Mona, her lips quivering.

“Very well. Give it to me. Oh, yes; quite right,” glancing at the address. “You must keep him informed of your whereabouts. It's hard times for him, poor fellow, all this delay.” The long drive to Westbourne Villas passed almost in silence on Mona's side. To Madame Debrisay silence was abhorrent, and she poured out much information respecting the changes she had made in her dwelling—the additional pupils promised her next month. “I am glad I have the rest of this one comparatively free. I can give a little time to you, my dear child. And here we are, thank God. You will be the better of a cup of tea.”

Mona was, indeed, thankful to have, so far, accomplished her purpose as to be under the roof of her only sympathetic friend; but her heart fainted within her at the thought of the confession she had to make. If Madame Debrisay refused to harbour her, what was she

to do? Meantime that busy woman fidgeted to and fro. She lit the already glowing fire, made the kettle boil up, infused tea and cut brown bread and butter with immense energy, while—having put aside her bonnet and cloak—lay back in a comfortable little basket-chair—indescribable despondency expressed in line of her slight form—her hands clasped and motionless.

"There now," said madame, placing a small table with a tea and plate of bread and butter beside her young guest, that, and get warmed. Then say your say, for I can see you are full. It's like a ghost you are—an uneasy ghost, dear, that contrived to deliver its message."

"I have no doubt of it," returned Mona, with a faint smile. "You describe what I feel myself to be, exactly."

Madame Debrisay looked at her with kind, compassionate eyes and stirred her own tea reflectively—remaining silent for a usual length of time.

"Now," she said, when the repast was finished—having neatly packed up the cups and saucers, and popped (no other words the action) the tray outside—"now, come, open your heart to me, dear, for I know you are in trouble."

"I am indeed," returned Mona, in a voice that faltered and shook in a way far more touching than the most violent bursts of tears. "I have determined to break off my engagement!"

"And you within a day of being his wife, if your dear grandmother hadn't been swept away in a minute! No, I listen to you. It's mad, and bad, and not like yourself at all! Will Sir Robert say, and—Lady Mary? Who'd have told you'd be so cruel and false? I must say it, dear! Indeed, I thought there was misfortune coming, since I had your note. And the thing told me you wouldn't marry him. Ah! my poor Waring deserved better at her hands!"

"I knew you would be angry," said Mona sadly, "but I can't help it. I cannot marry him or anyone. Life is too hard!"

"Ah! then do you think you'll make it softer by keeping silent? I know better. Life is cruel to a single woman that's poor, pretty, and delicately reared, as you are. How do you manage to live? What can you do to earn a crust?"

"Not much, certainly; but I have the will, and I am persevering and don't speak so cruelly, Deb, for I feel heart-broken."

"God forgive me," said madame solemnly. "He knows I share my last loaf with you, and will too; but I am angry with my darling. You are flying in the face of Providence, and do an excellent young man to an early grave."

"I do not think that, Deb. Nay, I suppose in a month or two I will be in love with someone else. I do not think he is the same man who will destroy himself for an ideal."

"Tell me the truth, Mona, my dear child. Are you in love with another—some poor creature you can't marry?"

"No ; in truth I am not. There is not a man on the face of the earth at this moment I would willingly marry."

"I believe you, for I never knew you speak falsely yet ; but there is something under it all I can't make out. I always thought there was. Maybe you will tell me one day. Now, listen to me. If you ever cared for your dear, good, generous grandmother, don't be in a hurry ; just say your prayers, and *think*. Believe me, it's awfully hard to pick up a living, especially when you haven't anyone to take you by the hand. And you have turned everyone against me, or you will. Don't quarrel with the poor young fellow that has given you his whole heart. Take a day or two to think what you're doing."

"I have done it, Deb," stretching out her hand, and laying it on her friend's plump arm. "You posted *the* letter to him yourself, didn't you now."

"Ah ! that was base of you—base, to take my hand to deal the blow. I'll never forgive you, never !"

"Yes, you will—you must," rising and kneeling beside her, while she clasped her arms around her waist. "I have no one in the world to turn to but you, Deb, and I cannot marry this man—I cannot, indeed."

"And you have written to him ? Then he will never rest satisfied without seeing you ; and when he comes, in the name of God, let him persuade you."

"I cannot promise *that*, Deb, dear. I will not see him if I can help it ; but if he insists, why, I will. He has a right to so much, and I cannot refuse."

"Oh ! that is something. No, don't refuse ; you let him persuade you when he does find. I'll be bound when he opens his lips and tells you how he has trusted to your word, he will bring you around. Promise me you will hear him."

"I will," said Mona gently ; "and if he insists on keeping me to my word, I will keep it ; but—but after reading my letter, I do not think he will."

"Don't be too sure of that. Now tell me, have you told Lady Mary ?"

"Not yet. I thought I would wait till I had his answer."

"That's right. He'll come and speak his answer himself, or I am much mistaken, and—well, we'll wait and see what it will be."

"He will not hold me to my word !"

"I am not so sure. Anyway, I'll talk no more to you about him this day. You are just tired and done for. We'll leave the matter to Heaven ; and you must rest. Do you remember what you said your unlucky letter ?"

"Yes. I told him I was driven by my grandmother's position to reject him ; that I was heartily ashamed of having misled him ; that I felt it was only just to tell him that I did not, and could not, love him as a wife ought to love ; that I deeply deplored the pain I had caused him, and humbly begged his forgiveness ; that I thanked him

for his goodness, and prayed that he would forget me, and so happy with someone more worthy than myself."

"Ah! I know—the usual sort of thing. It would serve right if he never replied. Ah, Mona, Mona! this is the first mistake ever you made. Still, I'll not turn my back on your poor child, and maybe—maybe your luck won't leave you yet."

CHAPTER VI.

THE TUG OF WAR.

THE change from the luxurious elegance of the "Chas Madame Debrisay's London lodgings, was about as great as could be imagined.

Yet the house was not mean. The "widow woman" who owned it had a certain refinement. Instead of the usual extremely unclean and unkempt "slavey," she had an elderly servant of neat and imposing aspect, who had been with her for years, and who was a terror to Madame Debrisay.

The lodger who occupied the upper floor was a steady elderly clerk, of remarkable punctuality and precision. Still the taste of the homely dwelling was new to Mona, who had been accustomed to the aristocratic, if narrow, nicety of her grandmother's house and the distinction of her relatives' establishments.

The only members of the family who had accepted Mrs. Newburgh's grand-daughter frankly and cordially, were Sir Robert and Lady Mary Everard. The rest looked on her as an interloper, an offshot tainted by an admixture of blood that was anything but pure. Of this she was but dimly conscious. While under her grandmother's wing, she had been received with decent civility; now, she was keenly that she was about to alienate the only real friends she possessed—to sink from the level of the Newburgh traditions to that of a struggling, almost adventurous, nobody. Yet she did not regret the desperate step she had taken. Why, at her age, should she care for herself for a long life to a thralldom that would irk her soul? Life demands so much. It takes the friction of a life-time to teach a young woman moderation and the wisdom of compromise.

To Mona, the notion of temperate liking, instead of devoted admiration, and the importunate adoration of a man who was so considered common-place and dull, was intolerable. Above all, she was so disenchanted with life, and love, and dreams of perfection, by St. John Lisle's conduct, that she fancied it was impossible to scatter fragments of imagination's shining temple could ever be reformed—not knowing the marvellous recuperative powers of the human mind and nature.

made her sleep so profoundly, that it took some moments of consciousness before she recognized where she was. The someone moving reminded her that she was sharing Debrisay's room, and presently that lady came out fully robed behind a large Japanese screen, which converted one room into a dressing closet.

"How did you sleep, dear?"

"Well; too well!" exclaimed Mona.

"Stay where you are. I'll bring you a cup of coffee and a rest, for I have a long, busy day before me. I go to Mrs. Grand establishment first, over at Kensington. I am there for mortal hours, then I get a bit of food; and give two private sittings in the same neighbourhood, so I am obliged to leave you early to-day. But business is business."

"Nurse it is; do not mind me!"

"Your good landlady will give you something to eat at her dinner-table; we will have a cosy tea together when I come in."

"Thank you, Deb."

"I see I have taken your advice, and changed my rooms. I am ready in time for you, my lamb; the front room is better sitting-room."

"I hurried away, and returned sooner than Mona could have expected, with a fragrant cup of *café au lait* and a slice of buttered

toast she put in her head with a cheerful—

"Now, make yourself comfortable, dear; there are some of a lot of *Family Herald*s in the next room; there are stories in them, they make your hair stand on end, and save time. Take the hand-bell if you want anything—none of the bells will ring. Good-bye, dear."

Dressed slowly, and went into the sitting-room. It was a wet day. The rain beat against the one large bow window overlooking it, and which looked over a small square of grass, with a bed in the middle, and a couple of trees next the railings, and led it from the street. It was a fairly well-kept front garden at the present time, being strewn with dead leaves, and so, in rain, it was not a cheerful prospect. The fire had been smothered with coal, and had succumbed to the load. The table was crooked; a very irregular pile of newspapers, *Heralds*, notices of concerts, overflowed an occasional table; but the room was good and in good order, though extremely mixed as to pattern; some of it, in fact, was Madame Debrisay's, and her landlady's.

The hand-bell evoked a tall, hard-featured woman, with thick hair, a spotless cap, and a dark print dress.

"The fire's gone out!" she repeated, in a high-pitched tone. "I Madame thinks coals'll light of themselves; she just pitches

them on, whether there is a spark alive or not. I'll fetch a few sticks, miss."

The fire burning, the hearth swept, and a few tidying touches bestowed on the room, made a vast improvement.

Mona threw herself into an arm-chair, and tried to think what was best to do. What pressed most upon her mind was the painful necessity of communicating with Lady Mary. She ought not to be left in ignorance of her intentions, but would it not be well to hear first what Leslie Waring would say. Yes, she would wait.

The previous evening she had posted a few lines to the Chase, announcing her safe arrival, she might therefore postpone her next letter for twenty-four hours.

By this time, her refusal to ratify her engagement had been read by her lover and she quivered at the idea of the pain and mortification she had inflicted. He would be awfully angry. Indeed, she hoped he would. It might help him to throw off his grief. He would write severely: she dreaded his letter—but surely he would be too bitterly offended to come in person to reproach her; that possibility was unspeakably terrible.

The dreary moments went slowly by—slowly, yet fast. She could not form any conception of what her future might be. Her powers of imagination, of conjecture, paused, paralysed, before the bristling difficulties of the present.

She could hardly expect a letter from Waring till the next day. He was staying—not very far away, in Hampshire—with the gentleman who had been his guardian, and for whom he had a great regard. This man was—Mona felt, rather than knew—opposed to his marriage with herself. She was convinced that he considered her not sufficiently well off or important to be a suitable match for his ex-ward. He would assist to rouse Waring's wrath against her, and would not let him lower himself by a personal interview.

She strove to swallow a morsel or two of the dinner set before her; she tried to gather the sense of an agonizing tale in the *London Reader*, and interest herself in the tremendous persecutions of the heroine. All in vain. Time, however, was rolling on; she might soon expect Madame Debrisay. Four o'clock struck when she had gone into the bedroom to seek for some piece of fancy work (which Madame Debrisay infinitely preferred to mending her clothes), when the sound of the front-door bell, followed by a step in the next room, made her hope that her kind hostess had returned. Going quickly in to greet her, she beheld Jane, the servant, in the act of lighting the gas, while by the window, looking paler—sterner than she thought he could, stood Leslie Waring!

"Good-morning," he said stiffly. "I thought I should find you in."

This while Jane pulled down the blind and retired. Then he made a step forward to where Mona stood, motionless—her trembling hands locked together, her eyes wide-opened, gazing at him.

"Do you seriously mean what you have written here?" he asked, in a thick, unsteady voice, as he drew forth and opened her letter.

"Yes," she said; "I do."

"Then I have a right to ask the reason of this sudden change. What have I done to deserve it?"

"You have deserved nothing but good and gratitude from me," faltered Mona, sinking into a chair, for she felt her limbs unable to support her.

"Then why do you desert me?"

"I told you in my letter—the whole truth; I can *not* love you as a wife ought to love.

"We agreed to get over that difficulty. I hoped to win your affection, if you were quite free from any other attachment."

"And I am, Mr Waring! There is not a man in existence whom I would accept at this moment. But"—she was growing calmer under the desperate necessity of explanation—"I also told you—what, indeed, I blushed to write—that my grandmother's wish, her overpowering need, induced me to consent to what, otherwise I should not have accepted."

"I understand. Then, Mona, you have treated me very badly. You took me when I was necessary to you; you throw me aside when you think you can do without me! And I love you so! I thought I was going straight into heaven when you promised to be my wife! I had faith in your promise to try and love me; and, after all, you were only sacrificing yourself to maintain your grandmother—a sacrifice you gladly escape as soon as you can! You have broken your contract!"

"You are justly angry. I cannot defend myself. But do you not think you will be happier with some woman, fairer and better than I am, who will love you heartily, and—"

"No one will ever be so fair and good as you seem to me; and as you reject me, how am I to believe that anyone will love me? You had every reason to love me, yet you could not."

"Love cannot reason."

"Then you know what love is?" cried Waring, sharply. "There is something still in your heart which you will not speak out! Ah, Mona! why can I not please you? Why are you so cruel? You have destroyed my life!"

There was such passionate despair in his voice that Mona was profoundly moved. That she had cruelly, selfishly, wronged him was borne in upon her with constraining force. She felt guilty, culpable, to the last degree; and wavering in her resolution—wishing, if possible, to do the right thing, she stammered,—

"If—if you think it worth accepting, I will retract that letter, and—and do my best."

"No!" interrupted Waring, with a dignity of which she did not imagine him capable. "You cannot endure me! I do not want."

victim ! I love you too well for that. But, ah, Mona, it is agony to think you will have to face the roughness of life ! Whether you love me or not—whether you desert me or not—I would give half I possess to shield you from all you dare to face. Promise you will let me help you if you need help—promise, Mona !”

“Surely,” she cried, greatly touched—“surely Heaven cursed you with something of a woman’s heart, or you would feel so tenderly and generously for one who has pained and wounded you ! I feel your superiority, and I humbly beg your forgiveness. I will always think of you as a true gentleman. May you have greater happiness than I could bestow. Here—take this back.”

“Pray keep it,” he said, as she held out her engagement ring diamonds.

“I cannot, Mr Waring ; you *must* take it back !”

He thrust it on his finger.

“Then it is all over between us !” he said passionately ; quite over ! Perhaps it is better so. It would have broken my heart to try in vain to win your love ; and, dear as you are, I will not have you without it. Good-bye, Mona ! you have taught how unlovable I am ; yet I might have made you happy.”

With a slight despairing gesture of the hand he turned and left her in a state of terrible agitation and doubt.

She did not expect to be so completely routed, so utterly ashamed. He was stronger and nobler than she thought. She had bargained with him, and she had lost him. She had offered to retract, and he had rejected her.

It pained her infinitely to think that his opinion of her had lowered—that she had been so faithless to her promise.

Yet she knew that had she renewed, or kept the engagement, she would be miserable.

“He will forget me soon,” she told herself. “To-day his heart was dignified and earnest, his feelings were deeply moved—tomorrow, his eye will be caught by some one of the many charming women he meets, and he will be far happier than with one whose heart is dead, like mine.”

She sat long quite still, thinking painfully, confusedly. Then she nervously sought her writing materials, and began a letter to Lady Mary.

What a task it was. How worthless and ungrateful her own conduct seemed to her as she strove to explain it and excuse her conduct. How insufficient, how puerile her objections must seem to the man who had not the key to the puzzle—that key none should ever find. She knew that had she never met Lisle, had she been heart-wholly his, she might have grown to like Waring sufficiently well to be his wife. But Lisle had lifted a corner of the veil which hides the mystery of life from young eyes, and given her a glimpse of human passion and the enchantment of it ;—now nothing less glowing could

-all else was tame and weak. And this hero whom she had ind with all the attributes of noblest manhood, strength and ten-
ness, the masterful decision of a fine intellect, the gentleness of
ight-errant, he had shown himself to her in his true colours,
swept away the illusions which had gathered round his image in
mind for ever. She said truly there was not a vestige of love in
heart for any man, nor did she believe she could ever believe in
her.

He did not dream of the enormous recuperative powers which
he possesses. Still it was a bitter blow, that sent her reeling
from the threshold of life, to recover as best she could her
ashed hopes of truth and tenderness—respectful love, everlasting
stancy.

He had not completed her difficult letter when Madame Debris
came in.

"I am quite done up!" she cried, "Such vile weather! I will
change my boots, and be with you in a minute. But I have a new
oil, so my Wednesdays will be well filled at Kensington. We'll
cover everything at tea."

He kindly woman's horror and amazement when Mona disclosed
dreadful fact that Waring had come to answer her letter in per-
son, and had gone away in sorrow and indignation, can be better
guined than described.

He was too deeply affected for speech. She pushed back her
hair from the table, and sat a silent image of grief.

"And is there nothing to be done!" she ejaculated. "*Dieu
Dieux!* It was my last hope, that when he came himself and
saw him face to face, drowned in sorrow, you'd have given way.
Had you the heart to refuse him again?"

But he did not ask me, dear Deb. He very properly said he
not want a victim. I think more highly of him than I ever did
before; but I am sure I have done right in acting as I have, and he
thank me yet!"

It is a downright tempting of Providence. Ah! Mona, you'll
die the day yet. And to make me post that letter! Ah! if I had
known what was in it, I'd have torn it into smithereens before your
face. What will become of you now? Everyone's hand will be
against you."

"Except yours, dear friend."

I tell you what. My hand is just itching to box your ears,
though it will never put me from you. If I only knew the truth,
I am keeping back something—I know you are. Ah! and Sir
Robert Everard. Won't he be in the fury, and Lady Mary. Well,
but I've had many a sore disappointment; but I think this is
at the worst. If your poor dear grandmamma could look from
grave—I mean down from heaven—I wonder what she would
say."

"Enlightened as she probably is by the knowledge of another world, she would, no doubt, approve of what I have done."

"It would be queer knowledge!"

For the rest of the evening Madame Debrisay kept silence, or nearly complete silence, which was, of course, pain and grief to her—while Mona finished and despatched her letter.

In due time it was answered, in rather a distracted fashion, by Lady Mary. She said she thought dear Mona must be under the influence of temporary insanity; that Sir Robert was going up to London to see what was really the matter; and that she prayed Heaven there might not be any secret mischief at the bottom of this unfortunate affair.

The idea of facing Sir Robert alone was too much for poor Mona.

"He will certainly be here to-morrow. Could you manage to stay at home, dear, dear Deb?" she said imploringly.

"Well, and I don't wonder you are frightened to see him! He will be like a raging lion—small blame to him! There, don't turn so white. I am a bit of a wild beast myself to speak so harsh to a bit of a girl like you! If I did not dread a hard, poverty-stricken life for you, I wouldn't be so mad. God knows, if my own baby girl had lived, I couldn't love her better than I do you! Yes, I will stay by you, my lamb. It will be a tolerably free day to-morrow. I'll write and put off my early lessons, for you may be sure he will come up hot foot the first thing in the morning to row us out of the place."

This assurance was some stay to Mona. She was very low—she had been for some time unable to eat, and her nerves had suffered severely from the shock of her grandmother's sudden death. It made Madame Debrisay's soft heart ache to see how thin and white her pet pupil had grown, how she started and trembled at any sudden noise, and, above all, at her steady effort to be calm and helpful. It was almost too much for her, this waiting for what the morrow should bring forth. She knew Sir Robert, though kind, was obdurate, and, like all sensitive creatures, she shrank from rough words. She strove to strengthen herself by reflecting that she was the best judge of what was best for her own happiness—that she had a right to decide for herself—that she was not bound to obey Sir Robert though she hated to contradict him.

Madame Debrisay put on her best black silk dress, and a prettily little morning cap of Brussels lace, in honour of the occasion; and Mona swept away the confused mass of papers into the bedroom and put the place into order, adding a few Christmas roses and geraniums, which she had persuaded Madame Debrisay to let her be. She knew how revolted the orderly baronet would be by any untidiness or a sordid lodging-house look, and she had a vague fear that he might take her from the asylum she had sought.

Madame had anticipated, Sir Robert came between

and twelve. A glance at his broad, usually good-humoured face showed how great was the wrath he had accumulated.

He came abruptly into the room, and without a word of greeting exclaimed,—

"What the deuce is the meaning of your extraordinary conduct, Mona? Have you quite lost your senses?"

"No, Sir Robert. I have been making up my mind to break off my engagement ever since my grandmother died," she said, gaining courage when absolutely under fire.

"By George! you ought to be ashamed to confess it. To throw off a young fellow that is a great deal to good for you, the moment a pressing necessity was removed. I never was so humiliated in my life as when Waring came to speak to me last night. You have settled yourself in his estimation: there will be no drawing him on again—a pretty position you have landed us all in. What's to become of you, I'd like to know?"

"I will try to take care of myself and not to trouble anyone."

"Take care of yourself! Why, you have acted like a perfect idiot."

"Well, Sir Robert," put in Madame Debrisay, "I must say it is the first time Miss Jescelyn has ever been told so! Marriage is a very serious undertaking, and though it might have been more satisfactory to her friends if she had married Mr. Waring, she has a right to do what she feels is best for her own happiness, and Mr. Waring's too."

Sir Robert Everard stared at her, with a "Who are you?" expression, as if amazed at her daring to speak.

"Oh, indeed! Perhaps she is acting under your advice?"

"No, indeed, Sir Robert! Madame Debrisay has been dreadfully angry with me. I confess I deserve that you should all be angry with me; still I do not regret what I have done."

"I haven't patience to listen to you, and—and I wash my hands of you. I don't suppose Waring would accept any overture now."

"And I shall certainly not make any," said Mona quickly.

"Then what is to become of you? You haven't a rap, and my doors shall be closed against you!"

"But mine are open to her," said Madame Debrisay, with dignity.

"I suspect, and I told Lady Mary so," he continued, without needing her, "that there is some clandestine love affair under all this. You have inherited your mother's taste for a low-born lover."

"If I find as good a husband, I shall be fortunate," cried Mona, with spirit; "nor should I be marrying beneath me. I have no wish to deny my kind, good father."

"Then, why did you drop his name?"

"I did not; poor grannie called me by my second baptismal name before I knew what a surname meant; but from this time forward, I will resume my father's."

"But you are known as a connection of my wife's. I will have you disgrace us; and I will not support you, unless I know we shall be spared that—"

"Disgrace you, indeed!" cried Madame Debrisay. "Whom do you disgrace in the same breath with Mona's name. You are getting yourself, Sir Robert! You may have a right to be angry perhaps, but don't let your anger make you forget you are a gentleman."

"By George! it's enough to make a saint swear, to see you put in a place like this to a good position. I can't take the charge of my future! You are too headstrong; and after Lady Mary and my Mona, you haven't a friend on earth!"

"I suppose I count for nothing?" said Madame Debrisay. "I am certainly a mere roomkeeper. I can't offer my dear young friend the splendours of Harrowby Chase, but I have an unblemished character, and owe no man a farthing. I work for my living, and make it independently. Moreover, I can put Mona in the way of doing the same, if she is in earnest. Though I am not worth a farthing, or a look, my ancestors were Norman knights when I daresay you herded their cattle, Sir Robert Everard; so your young kinswoman has a friend on earth, besides yourself and her ladyship."

Sir Robert looked at her amazed, then in a changed tone, with a gleam of amusement in his eyes, he said,—

"If I seemed rude, I regret it. Your young friend's unprincipled conduct to a worthy gentleman—who interceded for her, made absolutely interceded for her—has irritated me beyond endurance. Madame Debrisay bowed her forgiveness.

"I only wish to stay here, and to be forgotten," said Mona.

Sir Robert played with his watch-chain for a minute in silence.

"I believe it would be best," he said at last. "I renounce from this time forth, nor will I allow Lady Mary nor my girl to hold any communication with you. I have a couple of hundred pounds still in my hands of Mrs Newburgh's money, after paying funeral expenses and other things. I will send you a cheque for it and whatever belongs to you at the Chase."

"I have already put everything together, anticipating this exclusion," said Mona.

Sir Robert made a step or two towards the door, and paused irresolutely.

"I'll give you another chance. Will you authorize me to make overtures to Waring? I'll do my best for you, if you will."

"It is impossible I could consent to such a proposal!" cried Mona.

He turned to go.

"Though you are so angry, Sir Robert, I am not the less grateful for all your kindness," sobbed Mona. "I do love Lady Mary and Evelyn dearly; it is a cruel punishment never to see them again."

"I have no patience with sentimental bosh," he returned harshly. "Your action proves how much of real regard you have for any of us." And seizing his hat he left the room.

The next instant they heard the front door shut violently, and saw him walk rapidly down the road.

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW LIFE.

"So that's done," said Madame Debrisay, stirring the fire with some force, and putting down the poker with a clang.

"How awful angry he is!" exclaimed Mona, still standing where Sir Robert had left her.

"My dear," returned Madame Debrisay, "he is a brute. He might be angry—I am angry; but he had no business to speak as he did; and I might have been the wall, for all the notice he took of me. I trust and hope he will not do you out of any money you ought to have."

"Oh, Deb! how can you think of such a thing? Sir Robert Everard is the soul of honour, though he is rather hasty in temper."

"When people lose their tempers, they often lose their heads and their sense of justice. You may be foolish—I don't deny you are—but I cannot bear to see you crushed and miserable."

"I am unhappy, but I am not quite crushed. It rouses me to hear people talk as if there was no chance of salvation for me except as Leslie Waring's wife. I am young and willing to work; why should I not earn my living independently, as you said?"

"Why, of course I spoke up bold to that tyrant; but between you and me, the beginning is awful hard work. Still I have an idea. You must wait till I think it out. Meantime, I must go; and you, dear, just take a book, and lie down on the sofa and try to sleep. No one can keep their wits clear when they feel weak and worn out. When if I can get back in time, we'll have a walk. You must get acquainted with this neighbourhood."

An awful quiet settled down on Mona after these agitating interviews. There was nothing more to do—nothing more to be resisted. He did not regret what she had done, but the reaction was profound. A great gulf seemed to have yawned between her present and her past, which nothing could bridge over.

Her boxes arrived from Harrowby Chase, and a formal list of disbursements on account of the late Mrs. Newburgh from Sir Robert Everard, accompanied by a cheque for a hundred and fifty-three pounds, thirteen and fourpence, the balance due to her.

"There, dear Deb, there is my whole fortune! What shall I do with it?"

"We must take care of it, *ma belle*—great care. Let me see. I had better lodge it to my account, and I will give you an acknowledgment that I owe you that amount. I am proud to say I *have* an account at a bank. Began with the Post Office Savings Bank, dear; but as my connection grew, through your dear grandmother and others, I gathered enough to move a step higher. I make a fair amount for four months of the year—more than I ever hoped to do once—then rather less for four more—a trifle for two—and two don't count at all. If my health is spared, I hope to provide for my old age."

"I know you are a wonderful woman, dearest Deb. But I cannot live upon you. What scheme had you in your head for me the other day?"

"I will tell you. Now I am getting a name, people begin to bother me to teach quite little children, and I believe I have reached that point where a few airs would do me good. So I shall say I cannot undertake children under—oh! I'll fix an age by and-by; but that I should like them to be trained for a year, or whatever time it suits to say, by my pupil and assistant; that I will see what progress they are making occasionally, and that they may be considered as under my tuition, though at half-price. It will take, my dear, like wildfire. You are a very fair musician. We'll go into partnership, and make a good thing of it."

"What a splendid idea! Do you really think I can teach?"

"Not a doubt of it; but I can tell you it's horrid work, and needs the patience of Job. I begin to believe there is nothing on earth so rare as a good ear! You will get on, I am certain, only don't be too anxious, and be sure you give yourself airs. The public is a nettle that stings if it is too tenderly touched."

"I am not naturally meek, but I shall certainly feel anxious."

"Have faith in yourself, dear; it's the only way to get on. Then you have a bit of money for present use, and a splendid lot of clothes. You shall pay me for your board when you begin to earn two guineas a week. Then we'll do well. Though you were made for a different life, and so was I, dear—very different. I was the belle of Ballykillruddery, when it was headquarters for the district, though I say it that should not. Ah, well, God's will be done! Who knows what good fortune is in store for you. I can tell you, you are in luck to have your troubles early; mine didn't begin right till I was eight-and-twenty—over twenty years ago—and now the best hope is to make enough to die easy. Whereas there's a chance still of the beautiful young prince turning up for you."

"Not nowadays, dear Deb! And when do you think I may begin my battle for independence?"

"I spoke about you last week to Mrs. Mathewson. Her eldest

r screeches under my direction : I *cannot* keep her voice and there's a little thing of ten she wants me to take for the

Now I'll hand *her* over to you—they are rolling in riches ! a book on teaching the piano, in German. You study it, now it. Practise up a few of your noisiest pieces. People think you can teach music with your fingers, instead of your They are so taken with a few gymnastics on the keyboard." "Deb, I will practise diligently. I haven't touched the nice poor grannie died."

Well, it's time you began. You have a pretty touch and a finger. As to singing ; come, let us try that duet Signor who taught you last winter. What ages away that winter of have gone."

"Does it not ?" said Mona, with a deep sigh. All the glorious spring-time which succeeded it ; the dawn of delight when she first perceived that Lisle quietly but persistently sought her ; the charm of the delicious secrecy which deepened their mutual, silent understanding ; the history of those months which had been the culmination, so far, of her life, through her memory—clear, vivid, instantaneous. But she resolutely from the picture.

"Where is the book ?" she asked. "I will begin my preparation. I must do credit to your recommendation. I long to start in real life."

Life is a serious thing, yet it has its inspirations. The sense of real work—of earning hard money, has a dignity in its usefulness which scarcely anything else bestows ; and Mona would have rejoiced in this new development of energy, had she not been deeply wounded. Her sudden, complete renunciation by her friends at Harrowby Chase cut her to the soul, especially as she had in a measure deserved it. Her bitter disappointment Lisle was more regret for the loss of an illusion than sorrow for personal bereavement. In her short experience of society, she found friendships or intimacies save with Sir Robert Everard's

It was this abandonment that depressed and saddened her. Her bringing had not been luxurious. Mrs. Newburgh was a frugal economist, though a flavour of stateliness pervaded her life ; but, for her, Mona had been old enough to know there was a degree of certainty about her position and her future before her grandfather had finally and completely adopted her. Yet the life of that son had been delightful. Mona's was an imaginative and sensitive nature, though not without its practical side. The brilliant and beautiful surroundings of the society to which her grandmother had charmed her senses, and she had not seen enough of it to be aware of the deficiencies which appertain to it as to all human life. There was, however, a sound, true heart under her fair, exterior which made a home, however homely, not only bear-

able, but likeable, were love only an inmate to bind the inmates together with the golden links of tender sympathy. Then came the balm of constant employment. What a blessing was enfolded in the divine decree, "In the sweat of thy brow, shalt thou eat thy bread."

It was a curious, trying sensation the giving of her first lesson. If the well-dressed, demure little damsel to whom it was administered only knew how awfully afraid her elegant-looking teacher was of her, all chance of discipline would have been over. But silence, backed by gravity, is a splendid cover for nervousness; and Mona did not utter a word beyond what teaching required, nor did she ever feel the same panic again.

"She has beautiful frocks, mamma," was the sentence of the little ten-year-old. "Her black cloth must be tailor-made—it fits like a glove; and she has *such* beautiful jet ear-rings!"

Nor did the young lady doubt that a music-teacher so attired must be deserving of all attention.

So the new life was fully inaugurated soon after Christmas—the Christmas which poor Leslie Waring had hoped would be so heaven-bright—which Madame Debrisay and Mona quietly and sadly celebrated together. The former—who was a Catholic if she was anything—accompanied her young *protegee* to church, and enjoyed a particularly crisp French novel over the fire for the rest of the day; while Mona sat long at the piano, playing from memory and dreaming over the past. She gave few thoughts to the future.

"And," thought Madame Debrisay, "she might be dining in splendour—in Paris, or Rome, or London—with powdered flunkies behind her chair; not that there is much comfort to be got from them! Well, well, there's no accounting for a young girl's whims, but I'm as sure as I am sitting here that there's another man in the case, and, please God, if nothing is said she'll forget him."

So the days and weeks flew past, and Mona, with the bloom of youth, began to revive. A simple life, plenty to do, the society of a kindly and amusing companion, are wholesome tonic. Madame Debrisay was extremely amusing. She had been largely educated by observation. She was at once sceptical and credulous; her mind was utterly untrained—yet a certain keen mother-wit and largeness of heart made her judgment, on the whole, clear. She was still quick in temper, though it had been much chastened, and also extremely resentful of small slights.

Now it so happened that the gentleman who occupied the dining-room floor had a pet dog—a rough terrier—which he first believed was of the true "Dandie Dinmont" breed, and which Madame pronounced to be a "thoroughbred mongrel." It was a ill-tempered brute, and used to attack the house cat, which Madame Debrisay had taken under her protection. Dandie, as the dog was called, more than once pursued the cat into madame's sacred

and on one occasion had worried a small fur rug, by which she, for no reason, set great store.

A rather full message had therefore been despatched to the owner, telling him to keep his favourite chained up, as he had destroyed valuable property. The reply—which was no doubt never intended to meet Madame Debrisay's ear—was to the effect that Mr. Rigden was “Willing to pay half-a-crown for any twopenny-half-damage inflicted on her rags and jags.” This was intolerable; and of all the Debrisays—she was a Debrisay by birth as well as by marriage—rose in an indignant tide at the affront. Madame Debrisay sought a personal interview in the hall; and as Mr. Rigden was in a hurry to catch his omnibus, her dignity and stern remonstrance made not the slightest impression. He told her hastily, she would not heed the mischievous representations of a servant; that although he had certainly uttered the words attributed to him, he did not mean them to be repeated. He was quite willing to pay for the dog, but he would not chain up his dog to please Mrs. Debrisay or any one else. So saying he departed hastily, and slammed the door behind him.

“An ill-mannered barbarian!” as Madame Debrisay observed to

her. “A *roturier*, my dear; a *roturier*, *pur et simple*.” For this there was a running fire of hostilities, for Madame Debrisay was by no means disposed to turn her cheek to the smiter. The dogs had settled down to a regular routine. The depth of the winter was over; Parliament had met, and Mona had nearly as much to do as she could accomplish without fatigue, though she was willing to do more. Madame even talked of making a little excursion to the sea-side at the dead season, if things continued to prosper.

Mona was returning late one afternoon, after one of her busiest days. She was weary, but more hopeful, though she was thinking of her time last year she was looking forward to the mingled joy and sorrow of being presented. It was a little hard to be so suddenly cast down, and carried away from all the gaities and pleasures, society and distinction, that she had enjoyed a few months ago, of which she felt she should never return. Yet there was no bitterness in her regret; she felt that she was singularly fortunate in having found such a friend and such a home.

Her reflections were suddenly broken in upon by a familiar voice coming,—"By Jove! it is Mona! Mona Joscelyn!" and she perceived her further progress barred by Bertie Everard, Sir Robert's son, who was studying law, having no military proclivities, and whose legal knowledge would be useful in managing the family, which was by no means flourishing under his father's munificence.

"Bertie! I never dreamed of meeting you," as though the banishment had fallen on her had been "banishment"—that an encounter

between two inhabitants of the same town had been thereby rendered impossible.

"Nor did I. I thought you had emigrated, or been sent to a penitentiary, or some such thing. You see, when anyone drops out of sight in London, it is such a drop in the ocean, that he or she leaves no trace behind. I am quite glad to see you. Come, tell me all about yourself. Evy has wept gallons over you. She wanted to write, and the Lord knows what, but my mother strictly forbade her. You are an awful black sheep, you know—a lost mutton."

"Of course I am," said Mona, smiling. She understood her cousin's dry bluntness. "But you must acknowledge I have kept out of sight and not troubled you."

"Yes; it is quite true. Now I have met you, I am amazed to find you still exist. How have you managed it, Mona?"

"Why trouble about details? I exist, and want nothing—that is enough."

"Wonderful woman! Where are you going?"

"Home."

"Home? Is it far?"

"Not very."

"Let me come with you?"

"If you like. I am glad to have a chance of hearing about you all."

This brief colloquy took place on the Broad Walk, Kensington Gardens. Mona was crossing from a house in Queen's Gate, where her last lesson had been given.

Bertie Everard, a tall, thin, bony young man, most accurately got up, and as unlike father or mother as could be imagined, turned and accompanied her towards the Bayswater Road.

"Do you know, you are looking fairly well? Cheeks not quite so round, eyes a trifle more sombre than they were last year, but you are a pretty—no, a handsome girl still, Mona."

"I suppose one does not grow old in five or six months."

"No; but the tradition in our family is that you have been eating the bread of misery, and precious little of that, bedewed with the water of affliction, and—"

"And you were all content that I should, though we were such good friends, and enjoyed so many happy days together."

"It was all your own fault, you know. You took your own course. I daresay, if you asked her, my mother would have helped you; but she wasn't bound to look you up. Sentimental generosity is out of date altogether."

"I do not suppose it would have been a weakness of yours, at any rate. However, you need not fear for me. I get bread enough and to spare, and very pleasant bread, too. Now, tell me some news. How is your dear mother? She was always so good."

"She is exceedingly flourishing and busy, for Evelyn is going—"

be married—very good match—to Lord Finistoun. He is a pleasant, easy-going fellow—rather an ass, but that will suit Evy. She hasn't much brains herself."

"She has sense enough not to think she has all the brains of the family, as you do, Bertie."

"Yes, I do, and I am no great things after all. Your troubles have not taken the sharp edge off your tongue, Miss Joscelyn," he said, laughing.

"There is no Miss Joscelyn now. I have resumed my poor father's name. It is more suited to my fortunes and fancy."

"By Jove! And what is it? Craig? Um! It was a queer notion of Mrs. Newburgh's to suppress it. Nobody cares or thinks about names now, except for what they are worth on paper. I suppose you haven't heard or seen anything of Waring?"

"No; of course not."

"Nor anyone else either! Can't think what's become of him. Some one *did* say he was training a colt for the Derby. I daresay he is glad enough now that you have broke with him. Can't understand why men marry!—must be an awful bore."

"I have no doubt he is obliged to me."

"And you are deucedly sorry you gave him the chance, eh?"

"You would not believe me if I denied it."

"Well, no, I would not, though you are a rum sort of a girl, Mona. I always liked you. You say what you think, and you held your own with that grandmother of yours, who was as big a tyrant as I have met. You are a fool, too, in many ways—ready to cut your own throat for an idea; but there's something taking about you. I never thought St. John Lisle would lose his head as he did on your account. He kept it very quiet, but I saw through him. I see through a great many things."

"I never credited you with such powers of imagination before, Bertie."

"Oh, don't try that tone with me; I know what I am talking about. Of course he would only marry a woman with lots of money, as I think you had wit enough to know. He is enjoying himself in India. I had a letter from him some time ago—asked why he had not seen your marriage announced—asked it in a postscript—always a bad sign of womanish weakness. Where do you live, for Heaven's sake? We must be approaching the far west."

"Do not come any further, Bertie—you will die of fatigue."

"No, I will not, but you will, if it's a few miles further out; let me secure a cab, before we leave the haunts of civilization behind us."

"I think ten minutes more will bring us to our destination; but to copy your own amiable candour, I would rather you did not come. You will only satisfy your curiosity, and carry away materials for a ridiculous description to make Evy and Geraldine laugh."

"Why should you begrudge us our innocent mirth? It is an absurd prejudice to feel injured by being what is called 'turned into ridicule.' You have only to show a stolidly indifferent front, and you rob ridicule of its whole power."

"I wonder how you would like being laughed at yourself, Bertie?"

"Should not mind; but I am not ridiculous—I am too natural, and always say what I think."

"I often—I mean I used often, to wonder if you are as hard and heartless as you seem."

"I believe I am; but come on, I am determined to see your lair, and I do not dine till eight, so I have plenty of time."

"I cannot prevent you, but I do not want you." They walked a few paces in silence, then Mona asked—"And is Evelyn happy? Does she seem happy?"

"Happy as a child with a new toy—she and Finistoun make idiots of themselves in the most approved manner. It will be a great piece of news for her this *rencontre* with you."

"Does she still care for me?"

"She seemed to do so the last time we mentioned you."

"That was not recently?"—smiling.

"No, not very."

"I live here," said Mona, after a short silence, pausing before Madame Debrisay's abode.

"Ah! queer little box."

"We," said Mona gravely, "consider it a splendid residence; pray walk in, as you *will* come."

"You are horribly inhospitable," said Everard, laughing, and he followed her into the house.

On opening the door, Madame Debrisay was discovered resting in an arm-chair, beside a table set for tea. Her bonnet lay on the floor beside her, and her thick and undeniably disordered black hair was uncovered.

"This is Bertie Everard," said Mona quietly; "Evelyn's brother."

"Very pleased to see him I'm sure," said madame, rising bravely to face the intruder, and not deigning to pick up her bonnet.

"Your sister was one of my most charming pupils."

She fancied the visit was a freewill offering of friendship to Mona, and she was highly delighted with the visitor.

"Oh, indeed!" returned Everard. "I should not have thought it."

"And you find your sweet cousin looking well! I have done my best to take care of her."

"My cousin?" elevating his eyebrows. "Can you tell me the exact degree, Mona?—first, second, twenty-fifth?"

"Oh! a cousin removed to the vanishing point of relationship. I have not the faintest wish to claim you, Bertie."

"Really, Mona, my dear, that is not the retort courteous,"

"If you knew Mr. Everard better, dear Madame Debrisay, you would know that he despises courtesy in himself and others."

"I only hate shams," said Bertie frankly.

"Let me offer you a cup of tea," said Madame Debrisay, rather scandalized.

"Thank you ; I shall be glad of it, after our long, dusty walk. Really, it's not so bad, now we have got here," looking round with visible examination. "It is a better room than mine in the Temple !"

"Is that possible ?" cried Mona.

"And in better order. Did you fasten up that drapery at the back of the piano, Mona ?"

"She did, sir," said Madame Debrisay proudly ; "and, if you'd like to know, the stuff is oriental chintz, and we paid fourpence three farthings a yard for it at Whiteley's sale."

"By George ! you don't say so !" He was deeply interested in pounds, shillings and pence. "Why it looks capital."

So saying he took the milk jug and peeped into it.

"I regret it is not cream," said Madame Debrisay, colouring.

"Yes ! cream is an improvement, but the tea is very good."

"It would do you good, Bertie, if you would swallow the contents of the jug, provided it supplied you with the milk of human kindness, which you need so much."

"That's very smart, Miss Craig, but I don't want any such stuff in my composition. Your milky kindly people are generally asses, and are imposed upon right and left. Miss Craig's manners haven't improved since she came to stay with you, ma'am."

"There is no use trying to pierce your tough skin, Bertie. The hippopotamus is invulnerable to bullets."

"Yes, but he is an ugly beast !" added Madame Debrisay, with a gently reflective air.

Bertie laughed, not quite so easily as usual ; and there was a pause while he sipped his tea.

"That's rather a good picture," he said at length, nodding to a portrait of a refined foreign-looking man, with beautiful lace ruffles and cravat, and a costume of some two hundred years ago.

"It is the picture of M. Le Baron Debrisay de Coulanges, my grandfather's great-grandfather, who led a party of his co-religionists to Ireland, after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes," said Madame Debrisay, with dignity.

"The deuce he did ? What a bad choice. It's a good portrait. French portraits generally are. Who is the artist ?"

"That I cannot tell ; there are only initials on the picture."

"Pity it hasn't a well-known name on it. It would fetch a good price."

"No price would tempt me to part with it !" cried madame proudly.

"Oh, indeed! Now, tell me, how do you manage to rub along?"

"Madame Debrisay and I have entered into partnership; she takes the big pupils, and I take the little ones."

"By George! Does the squalling and strumming pay for all this?" waving his teaspoon comprehensively round.

"It does; but then you must remember it is all in the fourpence three farthings style of expense," said Madame Debrisay.

"Gad, what heaps of money we waste!" exclaimed Everard, putting down his cup. "What sums my father gets through! I suppose you never go to parties or things of that kind, so living out here is of no consequence."

"There are people who give parties, living even here," said Mona.

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and we sometimes go to the theatre, and enjoy it very much."

"Well, it's evident you are not breaking your heart, Mona. If you like the theatre, I will send you a box. I know a couple of managers—amusing vagabonds, they dine with me sometimes so I can ask them."

"Thank you! We shall be very glad. Now it is half-past six, Bertie; you had better go."

"Yes, I will. Is there a cab to be had in this neighbourhood?"

"Why not adopt the habits of the country, and try an omnibus; threepence to Tottenham Court Road, a shilling cab fare on to the Temple."

"Capital idea. Why one might live for half nothing up here."

"There are no rooms to let in this house, Bertie."

"That is a pity. Good-morning, Mrs. Debrisay; good-bye, Mona."

"Happy to see you again," said Madame Debrisay. "You are really quite a character."

"What the deuce does she mean?" asked Everard of himself, as he took up his neatly-rolled umbrella, and opened the door, while Madame Debrisay screamed after him to turn right and go on to a large church where the city omnibuses passed every ten minutes.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS.

variable spring, the hot dusty summer days, succeeded each and the partners worked steadily through all.

had gleams of diversion too, for Madame Debrisay had and acquaintances of her own profession who often gave her for concerts, and orders for the theatre. These were amuse- of which Mona had enjoyed but little during her residence r grandmother, whose fixed principle it was never to pay for ig of the sort. They were a source of great enjoyment, for was peculiarly alive to beauty and harmony, and had some- f the dramatic gift herself.

the exaggeration of youth, she reproached herself for being it and trivial as to forget too quickly the sorrows and disap- ents of the bygone year. Of all the trials which had been d into a few months, the one which came back to her oftenest r breaking with Leslie Waring. She always wished to hear but he had passed away completely out of her life.

ie Everard's remark respecting Lisle's admiration for herself, long on her mind. There was a certain comfort in it ; it l her wounded *amour propre* to know that she was not alto- self-deceived. But the impression of St. John Lisle was fast

Now and then in the park, at the theatre, some soldierly- ; man of fashion would remind her of him, and she thought sigh of the difference between the style of such cavaliers and inary toilers with whom it was her lot to associate in future. e began to look at that future with less of fear than she did, n ventured on a little castle building respecting a visit to y next year, for which she and Madame Debrisay agreed to up," and not to dissipate any of their little store in a sea-side s somewhat wet season.

nurse Bertie Everard forgot all about the orders ; nor did pay the visit Mona looked for so eagerly ; but the announce- her marriage--with a long list of wedding presents, includ- a Indian shawl from Her Majesty"--at the end of March, departure for a prolonged tour on the Continent, explained -appearance.

on is a great world. In no other place can anyone be so suc- y hidden ; and though Mona moved about everywhere with m that was new and delightful to her, she never encountered tocratic relatives but once, when she saw Lady Mary and her laughter driving down Piccadilly. She was, however, lost umble pedestrian crowd, and passed unnoticed.

A very hot July had driven away all Madame Debrisay's pug save two or three. The ranks of Mona's were also thinned, and b were planning a course of needlework and reading during the proaching time of rest.

The dog days had compelled their fellow lodger to muzzle the jectionable terrier—which made him unusually rampant when torture was removed in the house.

Mona had been out one morning to do some small housekeep errands as Madame Debrisay had a headache, and on re-entering house with a latch-key, was surprised to hear a sound of snarling: scuffling in their sitting room, the door of which was open. Go in quickly, she beheld Madame Debrisay, her cap slightly awry, deavouring to drag a lace shawl from the fangs of Dandie, w snarling and yelping, held on like grim death, stretching shawl to its fullest length, and dancing backwards, while she str at him ineffectually with a small hearth brush.

"*Diable de bete!*" she exclaimed. "Keep away from h Mona. I believe he is going mad."

"I believe he is only frightened and angry. Let it go, and pr ably he will too."

This diverting Madame Debrisay's attention, she relaxed grasp. The dog gave a vigorous pull, and trotted triumphantly w the lace in his mouth—head and tail erect—into the hall, where proceeded to tear it vehemently.

"Just look at that! The only decent thing I have to put on shoulders when I go out. Get away with you, you cur!"—a thr of the brush—"Call him off, Jane!"—another thrust—"T that"—throwing the brush at him finally.

This routed the foe. He jumped back, and Mona quic snatched up the shawl.

"My beautiful Chantilly shawl," almost wept Madame Debris "I got it at a sale the last year you were with us in Paris. This five francs seventy, and it's worth two hundred! It was as good new. I will not live in the house with such a brute! He will tearing our eyes out next! I felt a little better after that cup tea you brought me, so I did up my hair and came in. Who sho I see but my gentleman perched on the table where I had laid shawl after folding it up, scratching himself—no less—in the mid of my beautiful lace. I made one dash at it, and tumbled the br off. Instead of running away, he turned round with real *bourg* impudence—like his master's—fastened his ugly teeth in one corn and would *not* let go."

"I am sure, ma'am," said the landlady, coming in, "I am I sorry—I don't know how to express it. I don't know what's in dog. He is always trying to run up here, as if he knew it word you."

"I have no doubt he does," returned Madame Debrisay, ~~exa~~

g her lace. "Look here! There's a tear for you! Here's another! It's just ruined."

"I think I can mend it, dear," said Mona sympathetically.

"Now, Mrs. Puddiford," insisted Madame Debrisay impressively to her landlady, "I give you your choice—either that savage brute leaves the house, or I will."

"I'm sure, Madame Debrisay, ma'am, it would vex me sore to see you leave. Such a quiet lodger, and sure money. I will speak to Mr. Rigden, ma'am, and see if he can send the dog to the country. He is a good lodger too! but that taken up with the dog I don't now he will ever part with it."

"I neither know nor care," said Madame Debrisay solemnly. "I give you two days to expel the venomous cur, at the end of which time, should he remain, consider I have given notice."

"Dear, dear! why will gentlemen fancy these wild beasts?" almost whimpered the landlady.

"Gentlemen!" repeated Madame Debrisay, with a fine scorn, as she regulated her cap.

"To think how nicely settled I am, with two such first-rate lodgers, and then to think of being upset by a nasty dog. Ah! get out with you!"

This to the audacious animal, who dared to present himself on the threshold with an inquiring look. A violent flick of the duster she had brought in anticipation of something to be "wiped up," again ousted Dandie.

"Be sure you explain matters to Mr. Rigden *this night!*" said Madame Debrisay, with emphasis; "and let me know the result. Either he sends away his dog—or goes away with his dog—or Miss Raig and I go, *this day week!*" tragically.

"I will, ma'am!—I will!" sniffed the little landlady. "I foresee a heap of trouble. Mr. Rigden—he is that obstinate and touchy!"

"And you will find I can be touchy too, when I stand on my rights. Now, Mrs. Puddiford, I wish to hear no more about this until you bring me your decision to-morrow."

The landlady retired, pressing the corner of her duster to her eyes; while the yelps of the dog were heard from below, where he was being tied up.

"I think, dear Deb, I saw the very net which would go with the round of this shawl," said Mona, examining it carefully, "at Peter Robinson's; then I could lay the broken pattern over it, and copy it with black filoselle."

"I'm sure, if anyone could, it's yourself. You have the clever fingers!"

"You see, I done a good deal of lace work at the convent, and other work, in Germany. I am really fond of my needle. I do not even disdain darning stockings, provided they are taken in time; here is something soothing in those long, even lines of running."

"Well, I am sure you are welcome to mend all mine, for I hate it! But I don't like to see you sitting silent over your stitchery with a pale, sad face, as if you were comparing the present with the past. Ah! it's a terrible change for you!"

"Not half so bad as you imagine, Deb. The comfort of being with you is great; the consolation of being able to help myself is enormous; and at twenty—I shall be twenty in a couple of months—there is so much of life to be explored, that I may find an unexpected oasis! I am not always thinking of the past when I seem in a brown study—I am sometimes speculating on matters that puzzle me, which are probably beyond me, still they have a fascination."

"What are they, *cherie*?"

"Oh, there are a great variety of puzzling things. One, for instance, is the awful risk of marrying. It seems to me that the rarest of all qualities in human nature is constancy—yet marriage is for life! Your own character and taste may change several times before you are forty-five or fifty, and how can you still love the same person?"

"Ah, don't talk like a heathen, child! True love grows with your growth and always sees the same charm in the thing it loves—unless, indeed, that thing proves faithless and cruel; even then, some natures cannot be choked off."

"I cannot understand that," returned Mona. "I understand for giving a great deal—even faithlessness and change—for sake of the old love; but to love anyone who was indifferent to me, seems impossible."

"Stick to that, my dear; it will carry you safe through a good deal. But I don't think you know much of love, or you'd know, as I do, that it hopeth all things and endureth all things."

"I can believe that of a mother's—a sister's—a friend's love. But the love of lovers is different. There is a personal feeling in that which, if it evaporates, can never, I fancy, be recalled; nor do I see that one can complain of its disappearance. There is nothing to be done but to resign it without a struggle, and let one's own passion exhale and die out as fast as possible."

"I declare, you talk like a book! It's all very fine; but it's not natural feeling, not reason, that rules such matters—and so much the better for us poor miserable creatures. Yours is a man's creed—and a woman's, dear. Men never will be constant."

"Very likely not! Then another tremendous puzzle is life. Why are we sent here to endure so much certain pain—to taste such uncertain joy?"

"You are getting beyond me altogether! Good men tell us, to work out our salvation."

"Yes, good men of *your* church; but mine says that I never can—that a mental act of faith—which to many minds is impossible—will do more at the last moment than a lifetime of tender consideration for others—of self-sacrifice—of purity."

"*Par exemple!* You would make a first-rate Catholic, Mona. I am no great thing myself, but I would be proud to see you in the true Church. Ah, there's nothing like it, as churches go! God forgive me, I haven't been to confession for a year and more!"

"Never mind, dear Deb; your goodness to me will more than make up for that omission. But there is small chance of *my* becoming a Catholic; can you not see that?"

"No, I can't. I tell you what I can see, that although you are an angel to me, there is a good dash of his Satanic Majesty in you."

"Perhaps there is. So be it, if it will help me in the battle of life! As far as I can see, the one unpardonable sin of life is poverty."

"Of life, Mona? No; of society. Yes, life is world-wide, society is a corner—often a shabby corner. Faith, dear, you and I are a brace of philosophers; only we are too wise to have a theory. Here's dinner; I hope it will be more digestible than your doctrines."

The next day was stormy, with heavy thunder-showers, and Madame Debrisay would not hear of Mona taking a journey to town in search of materials to repair the damage done by the delinquent Dandie. Moreover, a council of war had to be held.

Mr. Rigden was observed that morning to draw his umbrella from the stand with a degree of violence which upset all the other umbrellas and sticks, and "banged" the front door with recklessness which was in itself a *causus belli*. Soon after, Mrs. Puddiford appeared with a rueful countenance.

"Well'm I have spoken to Mr. Rigden. He is nowadays inclined to hear reason!"

"He wouldn't be a man if he did, unless it were on his own side!" ejaculated madame.

"He spoke most disrespectful," continued the landlady, beginning to play with the corner of her apron. "He said he would stand no more d—d nonsense (them was his words, ma'am), and was sorry he had just begun a month, as he would have to pay for it (he is a monthly tenant); that he would look out for rooms, and as soon as he ever found another place, free from cantankerous old women, he'd leave, if he forfeited a fortnight's rent. I am sorry to say he so far forgot himself, but them was his very words, ma'am."

"I assure you, Mrs. Puddiford, it is not of the slightest consequence whether Mr. Rigden considers me old and cantankerous or not. I congratulate *you* on getting rid of a troublesome, ill-bred inmate!"

"Well, that may be; but it is hard to lose six pounds a month!"

"Very well, Mrs. Puddiford, if you prefer it, *we* will turn out, and leave Mr. Rigden to make a menagerie of your house!"

"No, Madame Debrisay; far from it! You and Miss Craig are real ladies, and I would be grieved to see you leave; only six pounds are six pounds, and there is the dead season coming on!"

"*Season indeed!* Do you fancy the season affects an out-of-the

way population of clerks and teachers? Miss Craig and I will look out for you, and praise you up to the skies as the best of landladies, which you are!"

"I am sure ma'm, you are very good, and I believe you are luck! I am not sorry Mr. Rigden is going, only for the money! He was desp'rate partic'lar, and the dog is a hindrance!"

"Of course it is—shocking brute! We will do our best for you, Mrs. Puddiford."

"I am sure," added Madame Debrisay, *sotto voce*, when Mrs. P. had gone, "I hope I'll succeed, for if her rooms remain empty she'll think I have lost her her six pounds a month, and 'there will be wigs on the green!'"

"I hope nothing disagreeable will arise, for I have grown quite at home here!" exclaimed Mona.

"That man had a nice little room above stairs for his lumber. If I could get her a good lodger at six pounds a month without it, she might let you have it for a song," said Madame Debrisay reflectively.

"Ah, Deb, you are a profound schemer!"

The next day was bright and fresh after the thunder, and Mona having given a lesson in Gloucester Place early in the afternoon, went on to Regent's Circus to match the lace, intending to make madame's shawl as good as new.

Having done her shopping, she crossed to the other side, and walked a little way towards Tottenham Court Road, hoping to find room in an omnibus, without having to struggle at the regular stopping-place. Presently a Royal Oak omnibus came up, and paused before she hailed it. Mona hastened to enter as soon as an elderly and somewhat decrepit-looking man had descended, with the help of a stick and a baggy umbrella.

The omnibus moved on before the old gentleman had one foot clear of the step, and he fell prone on the damp, profusely watered ground. The driver of a hansom could hardly draw up quickly enough to prevent his horse from trampling on the prostrate figure, which seemed unable to recover the perpendicular.

Mona, by a natural impulse, bent down to assist him, and a burly policeman soon set him on his feet.

"No bones broke," he said cheerfully, feeling his legs and arms. "Here's your stick and umbrella. You go into the confectioner's there and take summat. You'll be as right as a trivet in five minutes."

So saying, he proceeded on his stately march, leaving the sufferer standing, with difficulty supporting his trembling self on his stick, and looking around with a pitiful expression of bewilderment.

"I am afraid you are hurt;" said Mona kindly. She did not like to desert him, for she felt he was not a Londoner.

just an awfu' pain i' my back," he said pantingly, "and feel e. If I could sit doon a bit."

He went into this shop and have a glass of water ; " and she guided him to the pastry-cook's close by, where she found a chair, and feeling at the old man's pallor, asked if he would not try a little and water.

"he said ; "I must have something to raise my heart !"

He closed partially, and Mona begged an attendant to bring her a glass of water. Her patient was a small, spare man, with thin grey hair, all whiskers, faded blue eyes, a contemptuously up-turned nose, and a wide, thin-lipped mouth. He was neatly dressed in a dark and salt coloured suit, and though not a gentleman, was by no means of the workman class, nor yet like a city clerk.

"and take a little of this," urged Mona.

"Thank ye, thank ye."

He took the glass to his lips and drank very slowly. "The Lord bless it," he said, placing it half emptied on the table, "for saviour ; but I am sair shaken !" Again he drank. "Ow !"—a low, strange sound between a groan and a sigh. "It was a power wi' me ! I am much beholden to you, my young man. I must try an' get awa' to my bed, but I can scarce stand. I'll get into a cab."

"I had better rest a few minutes first," said Mona, who felt compassion for him. "I am afraid you are more hurt than I."

"A puir frail bodie. Eh, but my back is twisted ! What'll I do now for a cab"—he called it a "cawb"—"to Camden,

not sure—eighteen pence or two shillings."

"How cruel, costly place ; but," apologetically, "I canna' help it. I'll pay for the spirit and water, and gang my lane."

He slipped into a side pocket—he routed out his trouser pockets—but no pocket—all in vain.

"I'll preserve us !—it's clean gane ! My pocket has been

stolen—that is dreadful ! I hope you had not much in it ?"

"Not much to lose ! A bit gold, half-a-crown, and a sixpence. I'll give you a shilling for my drap o' speerits."

"It is a mere trifle—I will pay for it." Going to the counter, he said,—"This poor gentleman's purse has been taken, I must pay for it."

"I'll say it is an accident that may happen to him again, if he is a young ladies' man to pay for him," said the buxom woman behind the counter, smiling—"sixpence, please."

"You feel equal to go home," said Mona, who was beginning to feel a little ashamed of her Quixotic attentions to this elderly man. "I will get you a cab if you like."

"Wait a bit. Where do you bide? I want to pay ye what ye laid oot."

"Oh! never mind; it does not matter."

"Ye are a Scotch lassie?"

"No, I never was in Scotland."

"Ah! I thocht ye were, from yer bonnie reed heid."

"Indeed!" said Mona, laughing.

She could not bear to have her hair considered red.

"Weel, I'll no leave this till I know where I'll find ye."

"There is my card then, but I live ever so far away. Pra not trouble about me; I am very glad to have been of any use to you."

"Ah! but you were! you have saved my life. If you had stood between me and that cawb, I'd have been a deid mon! try and get home."

Struggling to his feet, and seizing his umbrella, he hobbled to door. Mona followed him.

"You'll hear from me," said the old man, thrusting the card in his breast-pocket; "and I'll never forget ye, never. Could find me a shut-up cawb. I canna bide yon things, wi' the d stuck up behind."

"Yes; there is one!"

A very battered vehicle drew up.

"You drive me to Mrs. Smith's, number saxty-sax Carolina Cent, King's Road, Camden Town—d'ye know it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What will ye charge?"

"Two and sixpence."

"Two and sixpence! Whar do you think ye'll go to? I eighteenpence."

"Ask for his card, and make the people at your house settle suggested Mona.

"Make it two shillin', and I take you safe and aisy."

"Vara weel. Good-bye, missee; I cannot help thinking you a Scotch lassie."

With infinite difficulty and many groans, he scrambled in, closing his umbrella during the process. Mona picked it up and ga to him. He seated himself with his back to the horse, smiling nodding to his young protectress as he drove slowly away.

"What a funny adventure!" thought Mona. "I wonder Madame Debrisay will scold me."

But Madame Debrisay was in a placid mood when Mona reappeared home—for madame had her moods. She had passed the morning and some of the afternoon auditing her own and Mona's accounts. The result was, on the whole, satisfactory though,—"The money slips through your fingers is most amazing," she observed "though we have done pretty well, we couldn't afford a trip

not prudently; and *you* cannot put by anything. At all you have not reduced your own bit of money much, that's a ; keep a tight hold of it, dear."

g heard her friend's summary, and assisted to reduce the mall account books, scribbled scraps of paper, bills, and to something like order, Mona related her adventure, and did not scold.

ll it was funny! Maybe the old gentleman is a millionaire ise! they are generally queer. Maybe your sixpence will e sprat that caught a whale."

t have too much imagination, Deb," said Mona, laughing. was nothing of the millionaire about my old man. He was ble for a moneyed man. If they are queer, they are gener- sequential. I fancy he will make his way here. He is very owever, and I imagine 'cawbs'—as he calls them—are too r his taste. I am almost sorry I gave him my card, but he e determined to have it. He seemed so dazed and helpless, iever for him; but he is not by any means attractive."

l I shall be curious to see what will come of it! It is my at your meeting didn't happen for nothing," and Madame 7 shook her head solemnly. "I believe you are a lucky na."

y lucky in having you to befriend me! Your cap is very dear—go and put on your bonnet! I am not a bit tired. ndulge in a hansom to Kensington Gardens, and stroll about time for a late tea."

some unrevealed cause, there seems to be a tendency in o accumulate at intervals, like the seventh wave, which s tells us is always the largest. So after the monotonous many quiet weeks, the crop of incident which has been , bursts its bounds and expends itself in a few days.

aturday following Mona's rescue of the old Scotchman, she rised and delighted by the receipt of a letter from Evelyn , now Lady Finistoun.

voluminous apologies for her silence, she expressed her mpathy with her "dearest cousin."

y were all so angry with you, that, without giving myself ole to think (my usual way you know), I took for granted were a dreadful criminal; still I was as fond of you as ever other would not hear of my writing. Then I was so bewil- out Finistoun. He came and went, and some people thought oing to marry Lady Georgina Fitz-Maurice; but I did not. : was all settled; then we were frantically busy, and then I elling so much, and so selfishly happy, I never gave a to anyone, which is disgraceful, I know. Now, dear, that rried to the nicest, kindest, pleasantest of men, I feel you ite right to refuse Mr. Waring. Poor man—I liked him

very much. It must be quite awful to be united to anyone you cannot love with all your heart. Of course if Mrs. Newburgh had lived, it would have been different. I have told Finistoun all about you. He remembers you last year, and admires you very much. He says you are a plucky girl, but does not think you were wise to throw over Leslie Waring. The best of men, dear Mona, have very little sentiment about other people's marriages. Let us hope they have about their own. I do trust you are not very unhappy. Bertie said he met you, and that you were looking well, and seemed quite bright. Are you still living with that nice, pleasant Mrs. Debrisay? Pray give her my kind regards. I am sure I used to try her patience. Tell her I had some singing lessons when we were in Milan, and Signor Squallicini—a great man, I assure you—said I had been very well taught.

"We are getting tired of moving about, and intend returning in August to Scotland. Finistoun has a deer forest in the Western Highlands. We shall be there almost all the autumn. If I can at all manage it, I will come and see you as I pass through London; and you must come and stay with me. I am sure you will like Finistoun; he is not exactly handsome, but *distingue*, and really very clever. My father thinks very highly of him; and he is a sound Conservative. The dear mother is flourishing, and looks forward to presenting Geraldine next season. It is lonely, not having a daughter 'out.' Good-bye, dearest Mona. You will forgive my neglect, and grant I had a good excuse.—Ever your attached

"EVELYN FINISTOUN."

"I am not so sure about that," said Mona, smiling, as she put the letter which she had read aloud, back into its envelope. "But I am most grateful to her for writing at all. She is really a nice, dear thing."

"So she is. I am glad Squallicini thought she had been well taught. I have heard of him. He gets his guinea a lesson. I dare say I can do just as well, and I thought my fortune made when I first got seven-and-six. Why, Mona, there's a little man trying to open the gate—an old man, with a stick and an umbrella. It must be your millionaire."

CHAPTER IX.

"OH, MY PROPHETIC SOUL, MY UNCLE!"

In a few minutes the severe Jane entered, and told them there was "a—gentleman"—she hesitated before pronouncing the term—"wanting to see Miss Craig."

"Show him in at once, Jane," said Madame Debrisay graciously, and the hero of Mona's adventure came in slowly, having left his hat in the hall.

He had rather a low, wide head, and a kind of reluctant smile.

"You'll excuse me," he said, falling on to a chair, rather than taking a seat, "but I am varra fra'il. It's a long way from the station here. I told you, missee, I would not forget ye, and I haven't."

His exceedingly Scotch accent must be imagined.

"Very pleased to receive you, sir," said Madame Debrisay blandly.

"But you should not have taken the trouble," added Mona compassionately.

"I wanted to come," he said, wiping his brow with a red cotton pocket-handkerchief. "First, I wanted to pay ye back your siller"—he extracted a small bag purse from his trousers-pocket, and took out sixpence; "and there it is," laying it on the table. "Next, I wanted to ask you a few questions, if you don't mind."

"Certainly not."

He did not reply immediately, but looked inquisitively and sharply round the room.

"You have a nice, tidy place; a bit of garden is pleasant. It's better, a good deal, than where I am. Maybe it costs more. I pay a guinea a week for a bedroom and share of a sitting-room."

"We pay very little more for two rooms all to ourselves," said Madame Debrisay.

"Is she your mother?" he asked, looking at Mona.

"No, not my mother, though she behaves like one."

"Ah! And are you sure you have no Scotch blood?"

"My father was Scotch."

He drew forth her card, and looked at it, slowly reading out, "Miss M. J. Craig."

"What does the M. and the J. stand for?"

"Mona Joscelyn."

"They are not varra Christian-like names. Where did your father live?"

"In Glasgow."

"Ah! And now, what was your mother's name?"

"Newburgh."

"Ay, just so. Your father's name was John Craig, and he was a clerk in the Western Bank of Scotland?"

"His name was John; but I know little else about him. I remember faintly that he was kind and loving."

"Well, I knew him—knew him from his babyhood. My name is Craig—Alexander Craig, and I am your father's eldest brother."

"Indeed!" cried Mona, touched, nay, even pleased, to meet anyone of her father's blood. "Then you are my uncle, my own uncle!"

"I am that" he returned earnestly.

"But, my dear sir," ejaculated Madame Debrisay—"forgive the

caution of an old woman of the world—can you supply some proof that you are this dear child's nearest relative?"

"You are right to be cautious, mem. I have a letter from my niece's grandmother, written near fifteen years ago, offering to take her and provide for her, if her father's people would undertake never to come nigh her or interfere with her. I was a bachelor, and a busy man. I never approved of my brother's marriage. He took a wife from a class that despised his own, so I just let the poor wean go. I loved your father," he continued, looking at Mona, "almost like a son. You have a look of him, and a bonnie reed heid like his. Your mother was a pretty, dark-haired lassie; but I lost him when he married. She was too fine for me, and I lived away from them. Here's your grandmother's letter." He took out a large pocket-book, from the recesses of which he drew a letter, and, handing it to Mona, observed—"It's not over ceevil. She is just ane of those aristocrats that think a' the world's dirt but themselves."

Mona took it, and read the short sharp statement of Mrs. Newburgh's requirements, which was addressed to "Mr. Alexander Craig."

"It is indeed poor grannie's writing," she said, passing it to Madame Debrisay. "I am glad to find you, uncle!" and she gave her hand to her new-found relative.

"Thank you!" he exclaimed, holding it a minute. "It was just the guidin' o' Providence that brought you to yon fearsome street to help me. When I looked in your face, I felt you were nae that strange. But whar's your grandmother?"

"In her grave," said Mona sadly. "She died suddenly—in my arms."

"I hope she was weel prepared! And when was she called?"

"She died last November."

"Ah, weel! she'll have fund out by this time that the poor and lowly at this world are the elect of the next."

"Mrs. Newburgh was a true Christian and a real lady," put in Madame Debrisay emphatically.

"They don't always hang together," returned their new acquaintance.

"She was very, very good to me," said Mona.

"Anyway, you've had a wee like upbringing. You are not ashamed of your Uncle's family, though he's a plain bodie?"

"Ashamed? No, indeed."

"Now," he called to "now," "tell me how ye come to be here with this lady? I thought the Honorable Mrs. Newburgh—with some sarcastic stress on "the Honorable"—"was to leave you a fortune."

"Aye! my dear sir, my dear young friend's story has been a real tragedy," began Madame Debrisay, who proceeded, with suitable modulations of voice, to "recite" the tale of Mrs. Newburgh's

losses, and Mona's consequent poverty—of the necessity for her labouring in order to live, and being reduced to her present position.

Uncle Sandy listened with profound attention.

"Reduced, ye ca' it," he said. "It's no 'reducing' for an honest lassie to earn her own bread, which is mair honourable than the honours of the peerage! So you live here, my dearie! Ah, there's a good drop of Craig bluid in yer veins, or you would not have set up for yourself, like a wise lassie. If ye can keep a roof like this over your head, you canna be doing so bad."

"Remember my dear Madame Debrisay pays by far the larger half."

"And what is she to you?"

Mona explained.

"I think," said Uncle Sandy, with grave, deliberate approbation, "that you are just a pair of varra honest, respectable women."

"Thank you, uncle," said Mona, laughing. "We are both proud of your verdict."

"Perhaps," said Madame Debrisay insinuatingly, "perhaps your uncle would stay and share our modest mid-day repast. We have but a little cold roast beef, a salad, and '*omelette aux fines herbes*,' but at least it will avert the pangs of hunger."

"Roast beef, did you say?" asked Mr. Craig anxiously; "I canna digest boiled! But you're varra good, and I shall be happy to join you, for the pleeshure of your society! As I told you, I am varra frail. I worked hard a' my youth under a fine man, Mr. Kenneth Maceachern, of Maceachern & Leslie's, the great jute manufacturers. He retired, but he just missed the occupation, and went off like a puff of wind. I keepit on, and saved a bit, and my old master remembered me in his will, so, as I found my health failing, and new men coming into the firm, I thought I would rest and try to recover. I took a cottage an' a bit farm awa' in the west, but I got rheumatics, and grew worse, so I can' up to try a great London doctor, and was recommended to yon place in Camden Town. The son of one of our clerks lodges there; but he is out a' day, and I suspect a' the night too. I am just wearyin' o't; but I am not half cured yet. I wonder now if this place is much further from Harley Street?"

"By no means, my dear sir!" cried Madame Debrisay. "It is a shorter and a pleasanter drive. I presume you are consulting the famous Dr. Swaithem?"

"That's the man. He is awfu' costly."

"What matter! so long as you can regain your precious health. I think you would find this neighbourhood more salubrious, and in every way preferable."

"It may be. I will think of it."

"Will you not take the arm-chair, uncle?" said Mona; "that is such an uncomfortable one."

"Thank ye ; it's weel thought on." With various groans and twitches, Uncle Sandy transferred himself to the seat recommended. "Ye see," he explained, "I have been sair afflicted with a weakness in the spine ; it's a sore hindrance. I have been nigh a month in London, and I've not heard one of the famous preachers yet. I have not had many opportunities, and I am weel aware of my own defeecencies ; but if it was not for my puir frail body, I could improve myself rarely in this great cawpital. There's lectures, and concerts, and sermons, and the like."

"But I hope you will get stronger, uncle ; then you will be able to enjoy this wonderful town," said Mona kindly, touched by the poor man's desire to go to school again in his old age.

Here Madame Debrisay slipped quietly from the room—to make some addition to dinner, Mona did not doubt.

"Tell me," said Uncle Sandy—the hoarse whisper in which he usually spoke intensified—"tell me, what does she make you pay her for living here ?"

"She does not *charge* me anything. I pay my share of our food and fire—that is all."

"Ah ! and she is no of your blood ?"

"No ; I came to know her seven or eight years ago, as I told you."

"It is just wonderful," he ejaculated, and sat silent for some time, with a curious, half-satisfied, half-mocking smile in his face.

Then the prim figure of Jane appeared, and she proceeded to lay the cloth.

The dinner was very successful. Uncle Sandy was exceedingly communicative as to what he might and might not eat. At first he said he would take nothing but cold water to drink ; then he fancied there was a slight taste—he could not exactly define what—in the water, and when he perceived this, he had always been warned to qualify the water with a drop of spirits. He supposed they hadn't whisky ? No ; well he would do with a trifle of brandy. "The next time I come to see ye," he said, with an air of great generosity, "I'll bring you a bottle of real good stuff—it's far wholesomer than brandy." He seemed to enjoy his repast, and afterwards made many inquiries into Madame Debrisay's history. He was also profoundly interested in the prices current of all articles of consumption in London. Then, noticing the piano, he begged his niece to sing him a song. She complied. Before she was half through it he stopped her by observing that he had an uncommon ear for music, but that it must be Scotch music. So Mona changed her tune to "Oh ! wert thou in the cauld blast," which gave him great delight. He nodded his head and tapped the carpet with his stick in time to the music, and declared with feeble energy, that there were no songs like Scotch songs—no intelligence comparable to that of Scotsmen—no church system like that of Scotland. Then he looked at his

watch, and said he was sorry, but he must leave them ; that it was the only cheerful afternoon he had spent since he came to London, and expressed his resolution to look for lodgings in their neighbourhood.

"Pray, let me get you a cab," said Mona. "You will be so very tired walking all the way to the station a second time."

"Hoot, toot ! I am stronger since lately, and money is not so plentiful as to let me hire cabs everywhere I go. Naw, naw, I'll just walk to the station. I have my ticket to Gower Street, and I will get on fine from that for tippence. Good-bye, my lassie. I'll no forget how ye helpit your uncle. Good-bye to you, mem. Maybe you'll help me to find a respectable lodging. I can't come again till the day after to-morrow, for I have to see the doctor ; but if it is any way fine, I'll not fail you."

Mona went out to open the garden gate for him, and watched him hobbling down the road for a moment or two, and then returned to Madame Debrisay.

"What an extraordinary encounter !" cried Mona, throwing herself into a corner of the sofa, and laughing unrestrainedly. "I imagine Uncle Sandy is a character, and I really am sorry for his ill health and loneliness ; but I am afraid he will be rather a bore if he settles near us. He seems to have fascinated *you*, dear Deb."

"Poor creature. I did feel for him, and I think he is naturally a very superior man. But, Mona, my child, it's for your sake I spoke. Now Providence has thrown him in your way, I don't want you to lose your hold on him. Keep him by you, dear, and he will leave you all his money. No one can provide much for old age by teaching, and you must think of the future, *ma belle*."

"But how can you fancy he is rich ! He is evidently extremely careful of money, and he did let fall one word by which one could be authorised to consider him rich. He may have saved enough to live on, and pay his doctor's bill, but that will be about all."

"Well," returned Madame Debrisay, "there is no use arguing about what neither of us can be sure of. I have my ideas pretty strong, and I am sure you are not the girl to turn your back upon a relation because he is poor."

"I should hope not indeed !" cried Mona. "I am quite willing to do my best for the poor old man ; but he will worry us if he is anywhere near."

"It will not be for long," said Madame Debrisay soothingly. "He will be going back to his place in the west of Scotland as soon as he is cured."

"His place," cried Mona, laughing. "His cottage and farm, you mean."

"Never mind. He has enough to move about with, and pay doctors ; and you might as well have it after him, poor fellow. I do not think he is long for this world."

Mona laughed more heartily.

"You wicked, grasping Deb!" she exclaimed. "You want to turn me into a legacy hunter! I assure you I will be kind and attentive to my poor father's brother, whether he has a cottage or a castle. He will probably not stay here long, and we may as well make him happy. He must have had a dull life. It must be very hard to feel life slipping away before you have known enjoyment."

"Ah, my dear, don't you be downcast—times will mend."

"Do not fancy I am grumbling. I have some very bright days to look back upon"—a quick deep sigh—"and the present is far from being unhappy. Only, the Mona Joscelyn of this time last year has disappeared for ever, and Mona Craig, a more useful and sensible young woman, has replaced her."

"If I could see you rich and free, and in your proper place, I would die happy; and who knows I may yet see you get the better of those cold-hearted Everards."

"They are not cold-hearted. They had a right to be angry, and I have no feeling of resentment against them, though they might have asked what had become of me."

"If that is not coldness, I do not know what is."

A few more days brought them to August. During these days Uncle Sandy made no sign. Indeed, both Madame Debrisay and Mona were too much occupied with lessons, some of which were crowded together, to allow of pupils leaving town, and with their own affairs generally, to think much about him.

Both partners were looking forward to the delights of rest well earned. Mona was quietly but profoundly thankful that she had not been obliged to earn her bread amongst indifferent strangers—that she had been supported by the warm sympathy of a true friend.

Bereft of sympathy, life would be but a struggling mass of discordant atoms, without coherence, without harmony. Justice might guide our actions—even generosity might bestow its bounty; yet, needing that centripetal attraction, human souls would fly further and further from each other. Sympathy, too, is the informing soul of genius. The power to put one's self in another's place—to understand by the magic of fellow feeling his strength and weakness—to penetrate those dusky mental corners where lurk the meanness and deceit of which he is ashamed, and by which he is nevertheless actuated,—the broad kindness that disdains no atom of humanity, but sees a possible self in the poorest and most fallen—these bestow the faculty of true second sight on him who perceives much, because he loves much. Madame Debrisay and Mona were happy together, because they thoroughly understood each other.

There were depths in Mona's nature, perhaps, beyond the reach of madame's plummet; but there was nothing in hers to make it discordant. Indeed, the more it was called upon, the more readily

respond—as a high-mettled steed answers to the spur, or its heart in the attempt.

so enjoyed the pleasure of answering Lady Finistoun's letter, so delightful to be remembered after many days.

last lesson had been given—the last promises to write “direct—returned to town,” spoken, and Madame Debrisay and her partner, meeting accidentally in the train, walked home to-

do think,” said the former, “that ours is the neatest in the villas ; but I fancy the trees are turning a little al-

le green has deepened, that is all,” returned Mona. “Look, Mrs. Puddiford has put up a card. Mr. Rigden must be going than we thought.”

Well, I shall not be sorry, though I must say the dog has behaved very well lately. I will ask Mrs. Puddiford to come up after suppose he is going. I do hope she will rent the rooms soon. Truly is a bad season.”

Yes ; she will fret a good deal if she does not.”

Mrs. Puddiford disclosed a tale of woe.

Rigden had returned early, and informed her that he had better and cheaper rooms—that he was going away to the country next day—that he would take his dog, and would not return, where Mrs. Puddiford might make out his account at once, as he intended to hold any further communication with her.

He spoke that disdainful, ma'am, that I felt choked like ! To a good, regular-paying lodger, and him parting unfriendly, is

doubt it is, Mrs. Puddiford, but you will have nearly a fortnight, and in that time I'll find another tenant for you. I have my eye.”

Well'm, and I hope you will succeed, for the sight of those empty rooms is enough to give me indigestion.”

What do you think of, Deb ! Not my Uncle !” exclaimed Mona, as the landlady had retreated.

Yes, I do, dear. Then I could keep my eye on him, and it gives us much less trouble to look after his little wants if he stays in the same house.”

Well, really, Deb, I am afraid he would bore us greatly—though her unkind and selfish to say so.”

That is, *cherie*, and I am ashamed of you. But let the poor dog have a bit of comfort while he is in this strange wilderness of a house, it will help him to get better all the quicker, and then he will go off to his residence in the west of Scotland. Perhaps he will show his hospitalities, by inviting us to stay with him next year. For a month in the Highlands, and if you will only be guided by me and land and all will be yours.”

"House and land! Why, Deb, you are more imaginative than ever. However, do as you like. I am awfully selfish, I am afraid, but I dread that poor Uncle Sandy may spoil our holiday."

The following morning brought a letter from Mr. Craig, written in what had been a business hand, now run to seed, and exceedingly shaky.

He had been, he said, exceedingly unwell, and confined to the house with a bad cold; that he was now considerably better, and proposed calling on Wednesday first, when he hoped his niece and her friend—the orthography of whose name had escaped him—would assist in finding him suitable lodgings, as his present abode was cold and damp, and most prejudicial to his peculiar condition."

"Wednesday first!" repeated Mona. "Does he mean Wednesday next?—that will be to-morrow."

"He will come just in the nick of time!" exclaimed Madame Debrisay. "He is the very man for the rooms upstairs, and they are the rooms for him. Now, leave everything to me."

"Very well, dear, I know you only want to serve me."

Madame Debrisay lost no time in advising Mrs. Puddiford to put the rooms in order, as it was probable that a gentleman would look at them next day.

"A very advantageous tenant, Mrs. Puddiford," added madame, with some importance. "He is wealthy, but somewhat eccentric. He does not wish to be considered poor, or to seem poor—still he is sound and reliable, and will be most punctual."

"I am sure, ma'am, it will be rare luck to let my rooms straight off! and to a relation of Miss Craig's too."

"I will come up and look at them, Mrs. Puddiford."

"They are all in disorder now, ma'am; but I never let real dirt lay about."

So Madame Debrisay ascended, and remained some time absent.

When she returned, she took up the needlework she had left and said gravely,—

"Mona, my heart, write a line to your uncle; ask him to take his bit of dinner with us to-morrow, and mention that there are rooms to let in this house; but if they do not suit him we will look for others."

"I will ask him to dinner, certainly; but let us leave the question of lodgings to the chapter of accidents."

"Mona, I feel a conviction that you should not let that nice old man slip through your fingers."

"Dearest Deb! why do you talk as if you were a greedy legacy-hunter, when you are really the most generous and disinterested of mortals! I will do all I can for my uncle, but I will not let him interfere with my life—nor would I, if I believed he had many thousands to bequeath, which I do not."

Madame Debrisay opened her lips to speak, and then closed them firmly, keeping silent for some instants.

"Well, dear," she said at length, "maybe you are right. I am inclined to follow 'Will-o'-the-wisps;' take your own way."

"You are a wise Deb after all," returned Mona, going to the sitting-table, and beginning a note to her uncle. "Of course, if he chooses to take the rooms, I will make no objection."

"We will go out after dinner," observed Madame Debrisay, "and I get some ribbon for your hat. You will see if I don't turn out something equal to Madame Isabelle."

"I have no doubt you can—"

And Madame Debrisay glided skilfully away from the subject in dispute.

"There's 'The World,' ma'am, just come in," said Mrs. Puddird next morning. "Mr. Rigden, he have left no address, and I think I need not worrit myself about it; so I leave it with you to look at."

"Thank you!" returned Madame Debrisay. "I daresay there n't a word of truth in all these papers say; but it amuses one at an idle holiday time to look at it."

"Yes! poor graunie used to read it, and laugh and grumble all the time. It was amusing to hear her comparisons of the present with the past. She was very clever. She never railed at the differences which had come about. She evidently preferred things as they used to be, but accepted changes as inevitable, and probably improvements for a younger generation."

"Ah! *ciel!*" interrupted Madame Debrisay. "Listen to this. It is a paragraph among 'What people say':—

"Play has been unusually high for the time of year at Monte Carlo. One trio has lost or won large sums, and the *habitués* of the *salles de Jeu* have, night after night, hung absorbed on the fluctuations of their fortunes. One of these is a Russian prince, well known in fashionable circles, both in London and Paris. Another is an Austrian baron, celebrated for his theatrical speculations. The third, whose luck at first astonished the oldest frequenters of these famous rooms, is a young Englishman of good fortune and respectable connections—Mr. Leslie Waring—whose horse was the favourite at the Derby, and was so unexpectedly beaten, seemed to have recovered the favour of the fickle goddess, but has since lost very heavily. He shows great pluck, and is said to await with confidence, the turn of the tide."

Madame laid down the paper with a sigh.

"I am sorry for that poor fellow!" she exclaimed.

"And so am I; heartily sorry," said Mona, stopping short in her task of arranging some flowers.

"Ah! if he had had a good wife to keep him straight."

"Don't!" cried Mona. "Don't! I cannot bear it. And you are mistaken, Deb; it is not my fault. Mr. Waring told me himself his tendency was to gamble—his natural inclination. He was

honest and true, poor fellow ! Oh ! has he no friend to keep him straight ! ”

“ Hum ! the friend that could have guided him, he couldn't get.”

“ Still, I cannot—I will not blame myself. He has forgotten me long ago ; and as I am sure I should have made him but a cold, unsympathetic wife, he might have gambled all the same, if I *had* married him. You are too cruel, Deb ! ”

“ Ah ! *grand Dieu !* Don't cry, my darlin'. You'll look a perfect fright, when your uncle comes ! and, old or young, none of them have any feeling for an ill-looking woman. Besides, you are quite right. If the poor young man was a born gambler, maybe he would have beggared you. Do not think any more about him. You have done the flowers beautifully.”

“ But I can't help thinking ! I really liked Mr. Waring. He had a fine nature in some ways, and oh ! I do hope he is none the worse, really—for having met me.”

“ Well, there is no use in troubling your head about him now ! ”

Mona made no reply, but she did not think the less.

Uncle Sandy arrived in a “ cawb,” and Madame Debrisay in her neat black dress—she never wore colours—and a pretty lace cap, went out to assist his descent from the vehicle. A sharp wrangle ensued over the fare, from which Mr. Craig—cool, persistent, and utterly impervious to insult, where “ siller ” was concerned—came forth triumphant.

Mona, who had been making sauce for the salad, according to Madame Debrisay's recipe, had just placed the salad bowl on the table, when he stumped in with the aid of stick and umbrella.

“ Weel,” he said, tumbling into a chair and holding out his hand to Mona, “ I did not think I would live to see you again, but here I am.”

“ You are looking better than I hoped to see you,” she said kindly.

“ Eh ! I have been awfu' bad, and I am verra lonely in your place. Women-kind are aye thoughtful for the sick and weak, and I am pleased to take my bit dinner wi' you.”

“ And we are glad to see you.”

“ Can ye cook ? ” was his next question.

“ Well, not much.”

“ You see, my dear sir,” cried Madame Debrisay, “ the dear child has not much opportunity of learning ; but she has a natural aptitude which I endeavour to cultivate.”

“ That's right ; every woman ought to cook. Ye see, that's their natural work, that and doctoring—I don't mean prescribing medicine, but seeing to its being swallowed.”

By this time dinner had been placed on the table, and Uncle Sandy appreciated a fried sole, some boiled fowl with white sauce, and a “ *choufleur au gratin*,” prepared by Madame Debrisay's own and still pretty hands,

He spoke little while he ate, belonging to that unaffected class so think that dinner means eating—not social enjoyment.

When he had had enough, he pushed away his plate, and glancing at Madame Debrisay and Mona, who had been quietly waiting for him, returned thanks at some length, and then—very deliberately took a phial from his pocket, dropped a certain quantity into a glass, added water, and drank it.

"Ah!" he said, "I have had a good dinner, which is conducive to digestion. Now, Mona, what is the meaning of that bit card in the window; is it to say the rooms are to let?"

"They are, uncle."

"Then, if they are not too costly, I will take them. That young man—Auld Robertson's son—has not behaved as he should, and it is well I should have my brother's daughter to look after me."

"I shall be very happy to do all I can for you, uncle; but you must remember that when my pupils come back to town, I shall be obliged to go out a great deal."

"Never mind. Pupils or no pupils, you stick to me."

Madame Debrisay gave a slight nod and a proud glance, expressing, "Didn't I tell you," most distinctly.

"I'll look after you, if you will look after me?" he continued. Whenever Madame will come with me, I will go upstairs and see the place."

This intention was duly carried out, and Uncle Sandy, after careful examination, pronounced all to be "very good."

"It would suit me weel to bide under the same roof with ye both," he said "baith"), "and I do not wish to give any trouble. When ye buy for yersels, ye can buy for me. When ye have a pleasant look ye can lend it to me, and when I am frailer than my ordinar, aye," a nod to Mona, "can read to me. Noo, I'll give a—I don't mind, twenty-five shillin' a week, for the twa rooms."

"Let us see Mrs. Puddiford," quoth Madame Debrisay.

Whereupon a long discussion arose. Mr. Craig had no objection to be a monthly tenant.

"I have let my wee place for two years," he said, "and I can bide better here than elsewhere."

So after some haggling, for he would not hear of looking elsewhere, he became Mrs. Puddiford's tenant from the following Monday, at a large rent of five pounds ten per month.

CHAPTER X.

A HIGHLAND LADDIE.

UNCLE SANDY lost no time in shifting his quarters.

Early in the forenoon of the day on which his week in the Camden Town lodgings ended, he appeared at Westbourne Villas with all his effects.

It was a curious collection—a battered leather portmanteau, a couple of cushions strapped on top of it; a tin box, bursting with the number of medicine bottles, lotions, and embrocations crammed into it; a large, untidy parcel of books, tied with many pieces of twine knotted together; and one inexplicable item—a large, wide-mouthed, brown earthen jar, a square of canvas fastened over the orifice. These—a spare umbrella and two walking-sticks of different thickness—were carefully transferred to his apartments.

Mona and madame had endeavoured to make them look neat and cheerful, had contributed some flowers and a growing fern to the decoration of the sitting-room, and flattered themselves that Mr. Craig would be charmed with the attention.

"Ah!" he groaned a guttural "ah"—dropping into a chair as soon as he had mounted to his rooms. "It's an awfu' way up! I was better on the ground floor in yon house."

"Oh, I hope you wont regret the change!" said Madame Debrisay politely. "You will not want to go up or down stairs much; and you see the folding-doors to your *chambre a coucher* make it nice and airy."

"To my what?" asked Uncle Sandy. "I dinna understand foreign tongues."

"Your bedroom. You see, my dear sir, I am half French, and the language I have been so long accustomed to slips out now and then."

Uncle Sandy gave an inarticulate grunt in reply to this explanation, and then, looking round and sniffing vigorously, he exclaimed.—

"What's that I smell so strong?"

"Perhaps these flowers," returned Mona, who came in as he spoke, carrying his sticks and umbrella.

"Ay, no doubt. Just take them away, will ye? They are varra unwholesome!"

"Not in your sitting-room, uncle surely?" said Mona, smiling at the idea of the useless trouble she had taken.

"I am no so sure; and you must remember I'm frail—varra frail; it's my breathing and my back, and my puir, puir limbs"—

accents of the tenderest self-pity—"that just wears and distresses me from morn till night."

"It is *very* trying!" said Madame Debrisay sympathetically.

Mona unstrapped the cushions, and placed one behind him.

"Thank ye, thank ye, dearie!" in a more amiable tone.

"Would you like any refreshment?" asked Madame Debrisay.

"Weel, I might take a biscuit and a glass of apollonaris water."

"Water, alone, my dear sir? Will you not put something in to qualify it?"

"I am a temperance man, you see; but the doctors say I ought to take a drap whisky for my stomach's sake."

"I am so sorry! but we have not such a thing in the house! I will send Jane for some."

"London whisky!" cried Uncle Sandy, very audibly; adding, with pious earnestness, "God forbid!" Then rising he clutched Mona's arm with one hand and his stick with the other. "I have a drappie in my portmantle, and I'll just get it!"

"Can I get it for you, uncle?"

"Naw!" very decidedly. "I never give my keys to anyone!"

With many groans he bent his knees, leaning heavily on Mona—for the portmanteau had been placed on the floor—and managed to unlock it. Mona had stepped back as soon as he let her go, lest he should think her inquisitive; but the heavy lid was too much for him.

"Why don't ye give me a han'?" he asked querulously.

Mona came to his assistance, and the exceedingly mixed contents of the portmanteau were displayed to view.

Uncle Sandy pitched out trousers and waistcoats and socks recklessly till he reached the layer where the whisky-bottle was embedded; he handed it to his niece, and, having thrust his garments in again, locked the receptacle; and, rising with the help of madame and Mona, tumbled into his chair again, with many exclamations of pain. The desired refreshment was procured, and then Mona proposed that he should have the newspaper, and rest till dinner.

"Ay!" said Uncle Sandy, "that'll do fine. I am just awfu' weary. Are ye goin to give me a bite the day, as there is nothing preparat?"

"Certainly!" said Mona.

"It was our intention to beg the pleasure of your company," said Madame Debrisay.

"Then I'll come. It's a pity I have to gang doon stairs; but it canna be helpt!"

"My dear Deb," said Mona, sitting down again to some work which the arrival had interrupted, "I am afraid that Uncle Sandy will be something like Sinbad's Old Man of the Sea. You have undertaken rather a heavy task; it seems to me that he expects us to do everything for, and be everything to him."

"Well, well, Mona; you would not be cold and heartless to your poor father's only surviving brother? The poor old gentleman is worn out with fatigue and suffering; he will be more himself and more reasonable to-morrow. You would not refuse to soothe the declining years of a poor, lonely man?"

"No I will gladly help him in any way I can; but he may be rather a worry. However he seems something of a character, and may develop attractive qualities. I am quite sure my father was never like him! Could you fancy a high-born, handsome girl running away with Uncle Sandy at any period of his life?"

Madame Debrisay laughed heartily.

"Ah! Mona, you are a quare girl!"

When madame was thoroughly off her guard and speaking English, her native accent made itself heard occasionally. In French, she was fluent, with a pure Parisien pronunciation, which was valuable to her in her professional capacity.

From the date of Uncle Sandy's settlement the partners felt that the freedom of their holiday was over. He unhesitatingly claimed constant help and attention. Moreover, he cavilled at the price paid for everything they bought; and many were the commissions he gave both.

Still Madame Debrisay clung to the idea that he was a millionaire, though she carefully kept her impression to herself.

"It is only the rich who are so saving," she said to Mrs. Puddiford, with whom she often condescended to talk. "He always has money enough for whatever he wants."

"I don't think he is so bad as he seems, ma'am," returned the landlady. "He comes downstairs a good bit faster when nobody is looking."

"Oh! he is far from strong, I assure you. Indeed I don't think he is long for this world."

"Don't you, now, ma'am! Well, I don't know, I am sure."

From the beginning, Uncle Sandy, on finding that madame had the *Times* every morning for an hour, proposed to share the subscription and the perusal with her.

"You'll no care to read much of it," he said, "and it will lighten the expense to you. Then I get the *Scotsman*, and you are welcome to that when I have done with it."

"Oh! my dear Mr. Craig! I read my *Times* right through in holiday time. When I am off early to my work, I get it in the evening. Now I would advise you to buy the paper half-price, and read it quietly in the evening. You might sell the papers after for waste, you now."

Uncle Sandy thought this "verra wiselike." He then discovered that his eyes were uncommon weak of late, and he asked either Mona or Madame Debrisay to read to him, which they rarely refused to do. Next he took it into his head that he would like to "do"

London under Mona's guidance. This was rather a toilsome undertaking, for it was just "sinfu' waste" in his mind to hire a cab; and getting him in and out of omnibuses was no slight undertaking, to say nothing of a running fire of disputes with conductors, and laborious studying of the fares painted inside, while the vehicle "stopped the way" to a crowd of carts, hansoms, and vans.

Then Uncle Sandy, though confessing loudly his consciousness or inferiority, owing to his few opportunities or "privilegees," thought himself a remarkably intellectual man. He had no doubt heightened his natural obstinacy by self-education, and he had a tenacious memory, these qualities rendered him exceedingly contradictory. He would even question the dates given by the clerical verger who lectured on the chapels in Westminster Abbey, and keep a whole party waiting, impervious to the disgust of his learned interlocutor. He did not grow angry or excited; he simply slowly asserted his own views, without the slightest regard to the mental condition of his opponent—exciting in irritable people a wild desire to seize him by the throat, and give him a silencing squeeze.

With all his peculiarities, there was a certain originality in Uncle Sandy which attracted Mona. Although his ideas of expenditure were narrow, he was rigid in paying whatever he believed he ought to pay. Nor was he conscious of exacting more than he gave. Still, his recognition of the rights of others was by no means so clear as his perception of his own. But what attracted his niece most was his strong liking for herself.

Though undemonstrative, his small pale, querulous face always brightened when she came near him; and occasionally the appellation "my dearie" came to his lips unconsciously. He even remarked, with reluctant admiration, that she read verra clear and distinct for a Southron lassie. "No but ye show your Scotch blood," he would often add, "both by your working independent for your living, and by your bonnie reed heid."

The fact of her having red hair, as he considered it, seemed to be one of Mona's strongest claims upon his affection. It appeared to be a kind of proof positive that she belonged to him.

Curiously enough, Madame Debrisay never quite succeeded in winning his confidence, though attentive and considerate beyond what he could expect. He spoke to her less gently, and contradicted her more flaily than he did Mona. As his instincts where self was concerned were preternaturally keen, perhaps he felt that her kindness was less disinterested than Mona's, and could not picture to himself the devotion which could make one woman interested for another's sake.

His greatest enjoyment was to listen to Mona reading the papers to him—next to her playing of Scotch airs. He would listen to no other music save a few hymns or psalms. He was very particular about attending public worship, and insisted occasionally on Mona

accompanying him, that she might hear "soond doctrine," which was a great punishment, for he was exceedingly religious, in a dogmatic and disagreeable fashion. Madame Debrisay had skilfully and gracefully glided out of a proposal on his part to share their midday dinner, paying his proportion.

"It would be very nice, my dear Mr. Craig," she said; "but you see you might regret beginning what you could not continue; for when families return to town, and we begin to be busy, we often do not dine at all, and always irregularly. That would never suit your poor digestion."

"That's well thought," said Uncle Sandy gravely. "My food must be punctual, or I canna live."

"It is indeed of the last importance."

"I am surprised," he resumed, "to find how far Londoners are behind us in the matter of cooking. I brought a small bag of oatmeal, thinking I could get 'parritch' to my breakfast, and I went to the cost of an earthen pan to pit it in; but eh, sirs! what a fear-some-like mess the landlady in yon house made of it! I've not had the courage to ask for it mair."

"Porridge!" cried Madame Debrisay joyously. "My dear Mr. Craig, if I had had the faintest idea what the contents of that crock were, you should have had your porridge every day. I am to the manner born. We have the same thing by another name in my country. May I see the oatmeal, if it is in good condition?"

"Ay, that you may. It's in yon corner. If ye can give me my parritch every morn to my breakfast, I'll be anither mon. I have wanted it sore."

Madame scarcely waited the permission before she pounced upon the jar which had often puzzled her, and examined it carefully.

"It seems all right," she said triumphantly. "Let me take it away and keep it for you."

"Ay, so you may, only be sparing; for when that is gone, it will be troublesome and 'expenseeve' to get mair frae Scotland."

"I assure you, Mr. Craig, you can get every article you require better in London than anywhere else."

"But not oatmeal, I'm thinking."

"Yes, even oatmeal; and I will prove it to you."

"Awell, you're a clever woman; but I doubt if ye can manage that."

Madame bore away the "crock" in triumph, and informed Mona she had found a new way to the old man's heart.

Nevertheless, he did not swallow Madame Debrisay with the porridge made by her fair hands.

He appreciated it, however, and thanked her with more gratitude than he usually evinced.

Naturally the holiday enjoyments of the two friends were considerably curtailed by the presence of Uncle Sandy. Still they

contrived to spend two or three tranquilly pleasant days at Hampton Court, Richmond, and other suburban places of resort, though Uncle Sandy grumbled a good deal at being left alone.

The six weeks of vacation passed swiftly withal.

The autumn was exceptionally fine after a wet summer, and pupils prolonged their absence from town. October was half over, and Madame Debrisay was again in harness. Mona, too, had resumed work, and her uncle was divided between gratification at her industry and annoyance at her frequent absence. He was deeply interested in the details of her occupation, and she evidently rose in his estimation when he heard of the remuneration she received, which seemed to him very high. Money paid was, in his estimation the hall-mark of merit.

Through all this time Mona thought often and sadly of the paragraph which described Leslie Waring's supposed losses. She did not exactly believe that disappointed love had driven him to seek distraction in play; but had he not wasted his affection on herself, he might have found some one to share his home and his love, and were for another might have saved him.

It had been a cruel disappointment when one day, returning with Madame from a trip to Greenwich, she found Lady Finistoun's card. On the back was scribbled—"So sorry to miss you. Only arrived yesterday, and go north to-morrow. Will write from—"

Had she seen her cousin. She might have heard something of Waring without asking directly. And how delightful it would have been to see Evelyn once more.

The days had shortened considerably, and the nights had grown sharp and chill. Mr. Craig was painfully early both in rising and retiring. He was rarely out of bed at nine in winter or ten in summer; and being unable to get out of doors as much as in the fine early autumn days, was rather more exacting and troublesome. Mona found reading aloud more of a tax after teaching than it had seemed in her holiday time, but she rarely disappointed her uncle; when too tired Madame Debrisay supplied her place.

But he never approved the change.

"I don't know how it is, but for all I try, I don't think your uncle loves a bone in my skin. Never mind, so long as he is good to you, and remembers you, I am content."

"He ought to be very grateful to you, Deb, for all you have done for him."

"Ah, my dear! very few men have any gratitude to bestow."

These words were exchanged as Mona was about to ascend to her uncle's sitting-room, where she found him sitting over the fire, his feet on a hassock placed inside the fender.

"Come your ways," he cried. "The sight of you is good for sair een now-a-days! Have ye had your bite? Ay? Then we'll have a good spell o' the papers before bedtime. But, first, there's a V."

note I want to write to a laddie I have neglected in a way—my sister's son, Kenneth Macalister. He is in an office in the City—a big place—doin' well, I believe."

"A nephew of yours?"

"Ay, a nephew" (he pronounced it "nayfew"). "He used to come and see me there in Camden Town. But he and Jamie Black—the lad I shared the lodging with—used to make a noise, and argue, and go on wi' fools' talk, till I said I would not put up wi' it. And Kenneth—he had a Hielandman's temper—he got offended. Noo, he has come back from his holiday, and is clothed (I daur say he left off the breeks when he went home) and in his right mind. So he writes for leave to come and see me. He is a gude laddie, in a way—not varra weel informed; but everyone hasn't had opportunities, nor have they striven to edicate themselves as I have, though my disadvantages have been great. Noo, my hand is varra shaky the night, so you write for me, my dearie. Tell him to come early to kirk here bye, next Sawbawth, and come back with me to a bit din' r. Madame will let us dine with you—have a joint, or something a hungry laddie can cut from and come again. She'll tell me my share. Give him a bottle of beer. We'll say nawthing about the drap whisky—it's no that good for a young mon, and I haven't much left."

"Very well, uncle. How shall I begin? I never met this young man, who is, I suppose, a kinsin?"

"Not all out. My mither was twice married, and Kenneth's mither was my half-sister; still, he is a near kinsinan."

"I will write as if from you. Tell me what to say, and you can sign the letter."

"Varra weel."

A very few lines sufficed; a few directions as to trains were added, and the note was ready for signature.

"I want you to be kind and friendly to the laddie. You and he are all that's left of my people," said Uncle Sandy meditatively; "and he is no that bad—only self-opinionated."

"Now, there is nothing worse than being self-opinionated; it's just a barrier against the incoming of knowledge."

"No doubt," said Mona, with an irrepressible smile.

She took up the paper and read perseveringly, until her uncle, consulting his watch, decided it was time to go to bed.

The following Sunday was dull and grey, but dry.

Mr. Craig sometimes hobbled to "kirk" alone, when Mona struck and insisted on attending her own place of worship, much to his annoyance.

On the present occasion she started early, to reach a distant

church, thinking that dinner-time and the whole afternoon would be a sufficient sacrifice to her newly-found cousin.

She was a little late in returning, and went at once to lay aside her outdoor garments. While doing so, the sound of voices in the next room—the polite, guarded tones of Madame Debrisay, told her that she was receiving company.

Dinner was being placed on the table when she entered. Uncle Sandy had already taken his place, and Madame Debrisay was in the act of gracefully indicating his seat to a young man—a young man whose appearance startled Mona.

Hearing Uncle Sandy always speak of his “nayfew” as a “laddie,” she unconsciously formed a picture of an undersized, shy lad, slight and insignificant, with the family “reed heir”—something in style between a shopboy and an errand-boy. She actually beheld a very tall, well-built figure, surmounted by an exceedingly black head, the hair short and thick; heavy dark eyebrows, and large, dark, deep-set, flashing eyes; an equiline nose; high cheek bones; a pathetic mouth, with somewhat down-curved corners, unmasked by moustaches, and a deep red-brown complexion.

“This is Kenneth Macalister—your cousin Kenneth,” quoth Mr. Craig as he tucked a napkin under his chin.

Mona bowed and smiled, but Macalister took a large stride forward, holding out a big, bony, brown hand, and addressing as he exclaimed—

“I am very”—he said “ferry”—“glad to make your acquaintance.”

There was a certain dignity in his carriage, but Mona saw that he was shy, though probably his pride was strong to aid him in concealing it. She put her hand into his, saying pleasantly—

“It seems wonderful to me to dine with an uncle and a cousin. I have always seem denuded of near relatives.”

“Ay, but you have plenty!” said Macalister, taking his seat. “I have twenty-seven first-cousins on my father’s side, and fourteen on my mother’s. I have more than double that in second-cousins, but having been much from home, I cannot count all my far-away ones.”

He spoke with the soft, slow Highland accent, which must be imagined.

“Why, that is an awful army of relatives. Life would be too short to know them all.”

“We were once a powerful tribe,” he returned solemnly.

“Hoot man! eat your dinner and dinna fash us wi’ your auld-world stories,” said Uncle Sandy, as he received a tempting slice from a plump leg of Welsh mutton.

“I did not mean to weary you!” exclaimed Macalister, with a sick contraction of the brows; and silence reigned till the first pangs of hunger were appeased.

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"What'll ye tak'?" asked Mr. Craig presently; "beer or wine?"

"Neither, sir. I drink only water and a drop of whisky sometimes. Wine is rather indifferent in London"—this loftily.

The young Highlander would have let any amount of foxes gnaw his vitals before he would confess that he was almost a total abstainer, from motives of economy.

"It's no an indifferent price then," grumbled Uncle Sandy.

"We find a very tolerable light claret at fifteen shillings a dozen," remarked Madame Debrisay. "I fancy it might suit you, Mr. Craig, for a little change."

"Ay, but I diinna want a change. Good cold water is the best of all, only I am forced to qualify it now and again wi' a drop o' whisky, which I tak' medicinally, you understand."

"Have you been long in London?" asked Mona.

"Going on three years; before that, I was in a Glasgow house."

"And you like London better than Glasgow?"

"I hated both! but I am getting used to London: there is much to be done and learned here."

"It is a wonderful place. Do you often go to the theatre?"

"Scarce ever. I am tired after the day's work; and in summer I would rather take a row on the river."

"The young are aye carried awa wi' an inordinate love of amusement, an—an excitement, in these latter days."

"Man cannot live by bread alone," said Macalister gravely.

"Man wants food for imagination and wonder, and—and self-improvement."

"It ill becomes the son of a God-fearin' minister to be quoting Scripture for his ain weak purposes," observed Uncle Sandy reprovingly. "I will na' hear it, and it maks me in dread for your immortal soul when I do."

"Well, Uncle Sandy," cried Mona, coming to the rescue, "you must admit that all work and no play makes Jack a very dull boy."

"I am no so sure o' that; I worked hard enough, and I never was dull."

"And pray, Mr. Macalister, how is trade at present?" asked Madame Debrisay comprehensively, with a view to changing the subject.

This produced a lengthy and rambling reply, after which Uncle Sandy avowed his intention to closing his eyes for a quarter of an hour. He therefore reascended with his "nawfew's" help to his room. Madame Debrisay excused herself, because she had promised to visit some professional friends, so Mona was left alone with her newly-discovered cousin.

When he returned, after conveying Mr. Craig upstairs, he came down by the table, resting his elbow on it, and shading his eyes with his hand, he looked curiously at Mona, who was reading a French book of travels, which she laid down politely on his reappearing.

My uncle seems a good deal tired."

She did not know what in the world to talk about to this tall, semi-civilized young man.

"He is that! but he is an aged person: he has nearly reached the years allotted to man."

"I suppose so."

A pause.

"When my uncle wrote to me that he had found his brother's daughter, I did not think I should find such a grand young lady. You don't seem to belong to us, though the Macalisters are an old stock."

"You see I was always brought up in London and on the Continent; that makes me seem different. I am not grand."

"It is more than that," he said reflectively, "more than that. Yet you are like a young lady I used to go to school with when I was a wee lad. I saw her again this autumn when I was back in Glenhoul-aghan; and she is like you—*fery* like—only you are a little taller and statelier."

"And has she a 'bonnie reed heid,' as my uncle says I have?"

"Your locks are more gold than red," said the young Highlander, with an admiring smile; "but Mary's are browner, and she seems younger."

"And I suppose you enjoy getting away to the mountains and lochs of your native place?"

"Eh! it's another life. I had not been back for two years, and I had no mother to welcome me this time."

He stopped abruptly.

"That made a sad difference," said Mona softly.

He did not speak immediately, and when he did, it was to ask in an altered tone—"Were you ever in the Highlands?"

"Never."

"There is nothing like them anywhere! To be sure, I haven't seen much else, but there *can* be nothing finer. Whether it's the grey dawn flushing redder and redder over the mountain tops, or the soft evening fading from crimson and purple, gold and lilac, to the pale blue mist and silvery moonlight; and the air so fresh and free; the springy heather, that makes your step so light; the grand exulting sense of climbing higher and higher. I feel a man among my native hills—I'm just a dull machine in this big breathless town."

"Certainly not a dull one. You're a poet Mr. Macalister."

"Me? Well, no; I never tried writing verses; but I am a good craigs'-man, and not a bad shot; as to feeshing, few can touch me. Did you ever land a saumon?"

"No! I have only seen it boiled on a dish."

"Well!" enthusiastically, "it's just graund! I wish I could take you right away and show you all over the big mountains, the glen

and the straths ; and row you out on the quiet loch in the hush of the evening."

"I wish you could ! I should enjoy such a ramble immensely."

"Weel," in a lowered and mysterious tone, "my uncle maybe will ask you to stay at Craigdarroch. He has a lovely place there."

Here a violent peal of Mr. Craig's bell summoned them both to their attendance on that honoured relative.

"Do you know, Deb, I am quite interested in that young Highlander ; there is something uncommon about him—he is an original."

"I don't know, and I don't much care, about his originality, but I do care that he shouldn't come between you and your uncle's natural affection. My impression is that he is a selfish legacy hunter."

"In short, he is what you wish me to be. Oh, Deb, Deb !"

CHAPTER XI.

GLIMPSES OF THE PAST.

AFTER this first visit Kenneth Macalister came frequently on Sundays, and sometimes of a week-day evening. He would appear between eight and nine o'clock, having walked straight from the city after business—just to stretch his limbs, he said, after sitting cramped at a desk all day long.

Mr. Craig, though by no means cordial in his welcome, on the whole encouraged him to come, and seemed pleased that Mona lent him books from her scanty store, or played to him, which gave him great delight. Indeed she grew quite fond of the queer, half-developed, irritable, impressionable young man, who found such evident pleasure in her society.

Madame Debrisay, too—though distrusting his influence on Uncle Sandy—liked him in spite of herself. Homely and even uncouth as he was, he was free from the smallest tinge of vulgarity, and by nature was a true chivalrous gentleman. He had not much of the business faculty, yet plodded on steadily at his distasteful work. It seemed to Mona that he ought to have been a soldier, a herdsman, or an agriculturist, and that ungenial occupation, or some early trouble, had given a tinge of melancholy to his mind.

Meantime, her pupils increased, and she began to realize the wondrous healing powers of time and work—that to live for pleasure was a pure and partial existence. Uncle Sandy, however, missed her frequent companionship greatly, and did not hesitate to complain of her frequent absence.

"Sure, you can't leave off earning your bread to dance attendance on him," said Madame Debrisay, whose tender consideration for Mr.

had altered a good deal since his nephew appeared upon the scene. "He is really growing a cantankerous old soul. One would think the world was made for his use. You must just make him understand that you have your living to get, and if he wants you to marry his daughter, he should behave as a father."

Very well, Deb. I will tell him so."

But you need not quarrel with him, though. I think he really respects you."

So do I, and rather dependent on me, which disposes me to give a good deal to him. Do you know, he is a clever old man in some ways."

He says very bright things occasionally, and has read a great deal; yet how ignorant he is in some directions."

Ah! my dear, that's because he has had only books to instruct him."

It's a one-sided sort of knowledge that is not corrected by conversation with your fellow creatures."

His politics are very funny. He is a tremendous Radical as far as social matters and those above him in rank; but just tremendously Conservative as regards the rights of property and those who occupy a humbler position."

Of course he is. He is not the sort of man to see both sides of a question. I wish there was someone to keep him company, and to sit with him, when we are away. And he gets up so cruel early, his days are twice as long as they need be, for a creature that has nothing to do. Could you start him to write anything?"

I am afraid not. I think his medicine and his two walks a day, and that 'History of the Covenant' he has begun, will keep him very busy."

Well, I hope so. It certainly is a terrible thing to be old and alone. I sometimes wonder what will become of myself."

Ah! Deb, you and I must stick by each other."

You, my darlin'; you'll marry the prince yet."

The winter wore on. It was severe; but Mona going constantly kept free from cold. Kenneth had been gradually adopted by her, was her companion on many a Sunday. Indeed, Mrs. Pudding and her servant considered him to be Miss Craig's 'young man.' In this companionship Kenneth learned much of manners and even a little of thought—learned, too, with the rapidity of an impressionable nature. He admired and looked up to his cousin with profound conviction. His society amused Mona, and helped to make her feel younger and more cheerful. Her own remarks were exceedingly variable. Sometimes Uncle Sandy's cutting remarks and utter want of tact would raise his nephew's wrath, and he would pour out his wounded feelings with much confidence to his cousin, who generally reasoned with, and calmed

He thinks because he has a lot of money, and I have a right to say that he will remember his sister's son, that he can trample me

under his feet ; but I will have him to know that the Macalisters were gentlemen when the Craigs were lowland peasants."

"Come, Kenneth, don't insult the Craigs ; they are my people, and you must not be rude."

"You are quite different ; you are a queen—so you seem to me ; but you don't insult a fellow ! I'll not come near Uncle Sandy till—"

"Till next Sunday," interrupted Mona. "What should I do without my walk ? And, Kenneth, I always want you to come with me."

"Oh, I'll come, cousin Mona. No fear ; you sha'n't want your walk for me ; but Sandy Craig is no gentleman, though he is my mother's brother—half-brother, I mean."

Kenneth continued to speak, but his words conveyed no sense to Mona, for her eyes had been attracted by a well-known figure.

This conversation had taken place while the cousins were walking. They had come through Kensington Gardens, past the Albert Memorial, and, reaching the road, turned west, intending to return by Palace Gardens. Just in the narrowest part of the High Street, at the opposite side, two men stood talking—one short, stout, bowed-legged, and bull-necked, with amazingly tight trousers, a gaudy necktie, and a most horsey and repellent aspect. He had his back towards Mona as she came up. The gentleman with whom he was in deep conversation, and who faced her, was Waring.

Waring was looking dull and sullen ; his clothes carelessly put on, and an indescribable air of self-neglect pervading his appearance. Mona was so startled that she almost unconsciously put her hand through Macalister's arm, drawing near to him ; and he, somewhat surprised, bent his eyes upon her with a smile. Waring, who was talking eagerly, angrily glanced towards them at that moment. Their glances met—Mona blushed vividly, Waring grew white, hesitated, raised his hand to his hat ; but Mona had passed before he could lift it.

"What was the matter ?" asked Kenneth.

"I thought I saw a gentleman I used to know, and I—I was afraid he might come and speak to me."

"You should not be afraid of anyone when I am with you, cousin Mona ! I would not let anyone trouble you."

"But there are somethings you might not be able to help. However, it is no matter. No, Kenneth—do not look back."

"I cannot make out who it was," said Kenneth.

"Never mind. Tell me, where did you go to Church to-day, for you were not in time to go with Uncle Sandy ?"

"I had letters to write, so I stayed in my lodgings ; it's a comfort to write sometimes."

"No doubt it is ; and I do not think you care for your work in the city ?"

"No, I hate it ; but I must stick to it now ; I am too old for anything else. I would have liked to be a farmer—a sheep farmer—or a soldier."

"What opposing fancies—a gentle shepherd or a fighting man."

"Shepherds have always been fighting men ; David licked the Philistines !"

"True. And why, then, did you choose a career you disliked ?"

"Because I was forced. I am the only son of my mother, and she was a widow. I was in haste to deliver her from the burden, and the quickest way was through Uncle Sandy. He got me a clerkship in a Glasgow house, and then I got recommended on to London ; but it is slow work. It will be many a long day before I can get a home of my own, unless my uncle helps me ; and he is such an ill-tempered carle, I doubt if he will do much good to anyone whatever."

"He is not unkind," said Mona thoughtfully.

"No, he is not," returned Kenneth, who was getting over his ill-humour ; "and he told my mother that I should be his heir if I would take his name ! Now that's what I dinna like at all."

"Why should you mind ? You could put Macalister before the Craig and it would not sound badly."

"Maybe not ; anyway, it will be long before I need use it."

"Why, Kenneth, you speak as if you wanted poor Uncle Sandy to die ?"

"No ; I want no such thing, God knows ; but a bit help just now would be worth thousands later on, when one is too old to enjoy it."

"Why do you not tell him ?"

"Tell—tell him ? Why, I don't suppose he would ever see my face again if I did."

They talked in a friendly fashion till they reached the house, when the servant informed them that Mr. Craig had been asking for them, and the rest of the Sabbath was devoted to him.

Mona's sudden start and slight confusion soon passed from young Macalister's mind. But the encounter with Waring dwelt long in Mona's. She was greatly affected by seeing him look so changed for the worse. Ought she to bear the blame of this in any way ? No ! However grieved she might be, she could not suppose that the loss of herself had wrought such mischief. It was only his natural downward tendencies that were swaying him. And there was so much good in his nature, it was an infinite pity that he was thus dragged down. What a horror the man was to whom he had been speaking ! Poor Waring ! She would have liked to have remonstrated with and saved him ; but even had she the chance of doing so, she would have put herself in a false position by showing the kindly interest she felt.

A few days after this little adventure, and much about the time Mrs. Newburgh had died the previous year, Uncle Sandy was seized by a very sharp attack of bronchitis.

For a few days he was even in danger.

On this occasion Madame Debrisay distinguished herself. She was a capital nurse, and had had large experience.

Mona stayed with her uncle for two or three days, and did everything for him, under madame's direction. She was really touched by his suffering and his dependence. It would be dreadful to lose the last relative she had, and the only creature in the world, besides Madame Debrisay, who loved her.

Both were unceasing in their care ; but the latter was obliged to absent herself nearly all day, whereas Mona gave up her pupils that she might watch over the sufferer.

Mr. Craig seemed deeply touched by the thoughtful care of his nurses—especially by Madame Debrisay's : and the sort of mistrust with which he regarded her melted away.

The short Christmas holidays, therefore, were anything but a cheerful period to the partners ; and though Uncle Sandy was as fractious as an invalid well could be, his occasional bursts of grateful recognition obliterated the irritation of his testiness.

To Mona, the knowledge that he was going to make Kenneth his heir brought a certain liberty of action, which set her free from any fear of being indirectly hampered by fear of her own motives.

When Mr. Craig was able to get up, and stagger with Kenneth's help into his sitting-room, he was less disposed than usual to growl and find fault.

"Well, madam," he said, "ye may be wrang in the matter of doctrine, but you are a' right in the treatment of the sick. I'd have been a deid mon, if ye hadn't known what to do while they were seeking the doctor."

"I am very glad to be of any use to you ; but I think, as far as constant attention went, Mona was the best of all. She left nearly all her lessons, to stay with you. However, I am glad to say she has only lost two or three."

"Lost ! Did you say lost ?"

"Yes, my dear sir. You see, Tuesdays and Fridays are always very busy, and she gave up three pupils for those days, not to forego her attendance on you."

"That was verra kind—verra. I'll not forget it."

He seemed lost in reflection, while Madame Debrisay murmured to herself,—

"I wish he would remember it soon, or his memory won't keep it."

"I was just thinking that Mona has been like a daughter to me," resumed Mr. Craig. "I begin to think I'd be lonesome without her ? Eh ! Kenneth, my mon ; what do you say ?"

"You would feel fery desolate without her, now you have been accustomed to her ; and so might anyone. My cousin Mona is an uncommon, clever, bright young leddy."

"Eh ! ye think so, do you ? Aweel, aweel. Ye pit notions in me." A pause ensued. "An' hasna the meenister cam to ye

I were deid or alive? and I a regular attendant for nigh nine months! He was aye sharp enough to come seeking subscriptions for his charities, and a Christmas tree, or such like heathenish custom, but he hasna come to speak a word in season."

"Ministers in London are very hard worked," observed Kenneth. "They have so much to do with the poor, they just leave the rich to take care of themselves."

"And who says I am rich? If I have enough to pit food in my mouth, and a few decent duds on my back, have I no a soul to be saved? I daursay your priests," to Madame Debrisay, "would not leave an old man without the comforts of religion, because he keepit out of the workhouse?"

"Oh, certainly not," said Madame, laughing; "nor do I think any priest I ever knew, Catholic or Protestant, is inclined to neglect a penitent who has something to leave behind him."

"Ay, priests are all alike; but that's different from ministers; an', considering my years, it was a verra serious attack. Not that I am what you would call old, but then I have had weak health for many years, and sma' care—verra sma' care."

"Well, sir, I am sure you have been well tended this time?"

"I am not denyng it! but then it will cost me a lot of siller."

(He grew intensely Scotch when irritated or uneasy.)

"Life and health are worth more than gold," said Madame Debrisay cheerfully.

"Nae doot, nae doot! Yet life and health may be poverty struck, and not worth much."

"Anyway, life is given to us, and we must do the best we can with it," quoth Madame Debrisay, who was privately wondering what had become of Mona, as her usual hour for returning was over-past.

"That's a what few of us do," quoth Uncle Sandy, turning to his nephew. "I'd like to have a talk with ye the next time you come up here; there are one or two matters I should wish you to consider."

"My dear sir, if you wish to speak to Mr. Macalister, I will leave you together?"

"Not the day, not the day," said Uncle Sandy. "I have no strength to insist on anything."

"I am wondering what keeps Mona!" said Madame Debrisay; "she ought to be here by this time."

It was a Saturday afternoon, when Kenneth always got away from the City early.

"There is her ring!" she exclaimed, the next moment. "I'll go and see what kept her."

It was a wet, chill afternoon, with wild gusts of wind.

"Where have you been, my darlin'?" cried Madame Debrisay, going into the bedroom, where she heard Mona moving about.

"A very pleasant and unlooked-for *rencontre*," returned Mona,

who was taking off her damp outdoor garments. "I was coming away from Mrs. Churchill's, when a lady who had just driven up to the door suddenly called me by my name. 'Don't you remember me, Mona?' It was Evelyn. She seemed so pleased to see me! She had only come up to town for a few days, and was going to write to me to come and see her, as she was very hurried. Oh, she was looking so well and happy! She asked me to luncheon to-morrow. She is at their town house in Hyde Park Gardens, and wants to have a long talk. She is just the same as ever, only nicer—at least she seemed so. What a different world she moves in from ours, dear Deb!"

"Ah! widely different; but you don't let that fret you, my dear, do you?"

"No, I don't fret. Yet I am ashamed to think how I regret that brilliant, easy, abounding existence, where everything is fair and smooth, and neither roughness nor care come to irritate or oppress."

"Ah! my darlin', there are plenty of aching hearts under the smoothness, and poor human nature groans and yearns for what it can't get, all the same whether it's in a poor twenty-five shilling a week lodging, or a marble palace."

"If that is your opinion, Deb, why were you so angry with me for breaking with Mr. Waring?"

"Well, dear, you see people must live, and as hearts ache, no matter what covers them—sackcloth or satin—you might as well have satin, *and* a marble hall."

"That is not a sufficient reason. I suppose that whatever your abstract conviction may be, you grasp grandeur and wealth whenever you have a chance. I fear I am no wiser, dear, for all my romantic talk, only I am greedier than you are, Deb—I wanted love as well as luxury."

"Ah, then, didn't poor Waring give you lashin's of love!"

"Perhaps; but if he could not create it in me, what good did his love do me?"

"I am ashamed of your hard-heartedness, Mona. I expected better things of you."

"That is because you always over-rated me."

"Never mind. Just go up to your uncle; that wild Highlander has had him all to himself nearly the whole evening."

Mona set out to keep her appointment with Lady Finistoun with mixed feelings of pleasure, and a little irresistible mortification. At twenty, philosophy has not had time to strike its roots very deeply into the soul.

Mona was proud, but her pride had no tinge of meanness. In poverty she was not the least ashamed, so long as she was indebted to herself alone. Yet in old and highly artificial societies like ours, poverty is probably the most degrading condition into which man

woman can fall ; but the sting to Mona lay in her consciousness that the disapprobation and neglect of her relatives was in some degree deserved. She had not acted loyally to Waring ; she ought not to have broken faith with him when the immediate cause which forced her to accept him was removed. And he, too, must despise her !

However, all that was irrevocable now. Yet she hoped earnestly that Evelyn would be alone. She did not wish to meet any of her former friends, or rather acquaintances, to be pitied and questioned, however smiling and kind the mask they might put on. This was a contemptible weakness, she confessed to herself, but she could not raise herself above it.

Her ladyship had just gone to luncheon, said the elegant gentleman who opened the door. Would she walk in ?

Mona was shown into a library at the back of the house, where Evelyn sat at table, *tete-a-tete* with her husband.

"So glad to see you, dear ! Finistoun is obliged to go out, or we should have waited for you, and when we have got rid of him, we shall have such a nice long chat."

"Very complimentary to me," said Lord Finistoun, bowing, and smiling good-humouredly. "Happy to renew my acquaintance with you, though I am afraid you do not remember me."

"Yes, I remember you now," a quick blush passing over her face. She did well remember him. At the ball where she had first met Lisle, she had seen him talking long to Lord Finistoun, and fancied they were speaking of herself. He (Lord Finistoun) was very like Kenneth Macalister, only older, better dressed, and less good looking. He was tall and gaunt, but Evelyn was evidently satisfied with him.

In a few minutes Mona felt quite at home.

"And you are the naughty girl who riled everyone by ejecting your unfortunate *fiancee*," said Lord Finistoun, as he helped her to some cold grouse. "It was too bad, really. You deserve to be shut up and fed on bread and water."

"How very ill-bred of you, Finistoun, to mention it," cried his wife. "You have no discretion. I will not have Mona teased."

"I beg pardon if I have offended ; but I am sure Miss Joscelyn will forgive me. The poor fellow has gone under. The racecourse and the clubs know him no more. You have a great deal to answer for."

"He ought to be much obliged to me," returned Mona, as lightly as she could.

"Perhaps ; but then people seldom know what is good for them."

"A most ungallant speech. Pray remember that Mona has changed her name. She has taken her uncle's."

"Quite right, if he is going to leave you his fortune. By what name, then, shall I remember you in my prayers ?"

"My father's name was Craig, but my poor grandmother always chose to call me by my second Christian name."

"And why does this rich old uncle choose to live in such a remote region as Westbourne Villas?"

"I do not think he is rich, and he is only in London for a short time."

"Oh, nonsense! He must be rich. Make him take a house near us somewhere. Everyone will be pleased to see you again. Men do not adopt neices unless they can afford expensive luxuries."

"He is very unambitious, and has been seriously ill."

"You are sure you have not been administering slow poison in homœopathic globules?" asked Lord Finistoun. "You look a very resolute young woman, Miss Craig."

A little more light talk, and he left them, after a kindly expressed hope of seeing Mona soon again.

"I am not at home to anyone," said Lady Finistoun, as soon as the servant came back from opening the door.

"Come up to my room, Mona. We have only a few rooms open, as we go back to Cumberland on Tuesday. Now we shall have a delightful talk. Isn't Finistoun nice? He is such a good fellow. I thought him so dull and quiet when he came to the Chase—just after you made all that hubbub, dear? I didn't care about marrying him much, only he seemed so much in love with me—which nobody ever did before—and now I think him the most charming companion. Isn't he bright and pleasant?"

"He is indeed! I suppose you make him so happy, that his nature has developed, as plants do in sunshine."

"You are just the same as ever, Mona, with your quiet, funny air of wisdom. I wish you had married Mr. Waring. It is really very nice to be married to a kind, generous husband."

And so on about her own happiness and affairs for nearly an hour, then she exclaimed suddenly—

"But tell me about yourself! What an awful life you must lead with poor Madame Debrisay! though she is a dear old thing. Do you never go to a dance or—but of course not; you could not know the people about you."

"I assure you I am not dull. First because I am busy; then because I have a very agreeable companion. Then we go often to concerts—sometimes to theatres—and even now and then to soirees, where, if there is not much elegance, you sometimes hear exceedingly clever talk; but we—that is, Madame Debrisay, generally refuses. It cost too much in dress and cab hire."

"Is it possible! I thought cabs were the most economical mode of getting about! Dearest Mona, I am so sorry for you! And how wonderfully well you look!"

"I am well, and happy."

"Nonsense, dear! I will tell you what, you must come and stay with us. I don't care what they say at home, and I will give you some nice dresses."

"No, no, Evelyn! I have left your sphere for ever. I am not ngrateful to you. You are a kind, generous soul; but I have brown in my lot with the workers, and I cannot serve *fashion* and mammon. I must earn my bread."

"It sounds quite awful! I shall persuade you to come to me yet. Do tell me what the uncle is like?"

"Well, he is an ugly, little old man, not too pleasant in temper, and in very indifferent health. He talks like the people in Sir Walter Scott's novels, and he tries to convert me to Presbyterianism."

"What a fearful combination! He *must* have money, or he would never presume to be so disagreeable."

"I see no sign of it in his mode of life or his ideas of expenditure."

"How is it you let him bore you then?"

"He seems to have thrown himself upon me, while everyone else, except poor dear Deb, has thrown me off—and then I see he is fond of me. There is so much in that. Besides he is intelligent—a character, in fact. I feel his hold on me is tightening."

"Where did you find him?"

Mona gave the history of their first meeting.

"Depend on it, he will prove a 'treasure trove.' Where does he come from?"

"Somewhere near Glasgow. My father's people were—I scarcely know what—very humble in origin."

"And where does he live when he is at home?"

"I am not very sure. He has a cottage in the Western Highlands called 'Craigdarroch.'"

"Craigdarroch!" repeated Lady Finistoun, in great surprise. "Why, that is close to Strathairlie. I remember hearing that a rich textile manufacturer bought it. Yes, I know all about it now, dearest Mona; it must be the same Mr. Craig—a dreadful rich, Radical old miser! You don't mind my saying so, do you?"

"Oh, no! by no means," returned Mona, laughing. "It is very curious that you should know anything about him. Still, I cannot believe in his wealth; and he is certainly not a miser."

"This is a delightful discovery. Finistoun will be quite pleased; and then we shall see you in the autumn. We always go, or will go, to Strathairlie."

"But perhaps my uncle will not return there."

"Oh, yes, he will. Do not be so contradictory. My dear love, you will be a wealthy heiress yet! Craigdarroch is quite a lovely place. And there is a farm—a good large farm—and fishing rights attached to it, etc., etc."

Talk flowed freely, till Mona, observing the hour, insisted on taking leave.

"It is pouring rain. Do let me send you home in a cab!"

"No, dear Evelyn. You shall not send me in a cab. I will take care myself, for I do not wish to spoil my best gown."

"What a rebellious subject you are ! I protest I feel a load taken off my mind when I think you have a rich uncle in the toils. Keep fast hold of him."

CHAPTER XII.

A DILEMMA.

MADAME DEBRISAY'S words respecting Mona's sacrifices for her uncle had sunk into his soul.

He was generally a taciturn individual ; but at times communicative fits would seize him, of which, when they were past, he seemed half ashamed.

Mona's absence on the Sunday afternoon when she had lunched with Lady Finistoun, was a stumbling-block and rock of offence.

"Leddy Finistoun, indeed," he muttered, not addressing anyone in particular. "She and her people would have left the girlie to starve, and she must run back to eat of her bread. That's not the right spirit."

"But, uncle," said Mona, who was looking for the City article in the *Times*, "Evelyn was always fond of me. She is not responsible for what her people did."

"Eh ! They are all birds of the same feather. I'd have nowt to do wi' them."

"Lady Finistoun sought me, uncle. It would have been ungracious to reject her advances."

"Oh ! gang yer ain gate. The young always know better than the old and experienced."

Mona did not reply, and there was a pause. She found the article she had been looking for, and had just begun to read when Uncle Sandy stopped her, exclaiming—

"Bide a bit. I want to speak to you."

She laid down the newspaper, a little alarmed at the ominous beginning.

"Tell me truth," he resumed. "How are you paid for your singing lessons ?"

"Oh, mine are merely preparatory lessons ! so I do not get much."

"Ay, but how much ?"

"Three shillings a lesson, or thirty for twelve."

"Hum ! ha ! well !"—pulling out his purse—"there are three sovereigns for you. Madam told me you put off some pupils that ye might give your time to me, and I can nae forget it. I doubt if anyone ever did so much for me before. Now I don't want you to suffer loss through me. There, tak' the gowd ; ye're welcome. Before that is gone, ye'll maybe find other pupils."

"But, Uncle Sandy, I would rather not! Indeed I would rather not! I am sure I shall soon find other pupils, and—and I have a little money of my own—more than a hundred and twenty pounds. I was quite ready to give up the lesson that I might be with you. You were not fit to be left alone. I will not take the money."

"Nor will I take it back."

"You must indeed," she persisted.

"Hoot, toot! a young creature like you needn't hesitate to take it from her nearest of kin. Here, pit it in yer pocket."

"Let us make a bargain, uncle!" cried Mona gaily. "I do not want the money now, but when I do I'll ask for it."

"But I misdoubt me if you will: you have too much pride. Not but that I like your independent spirit—that comes from the Craigs. I'll just pit up the money in a bit paper, and it will be ready whenever you want it."

"Thank you, uncle. I will ask for it if I want it; but I hope I shall not. Do you know that Lord and Lady Finistoun are your neighbours at Craigdarroch?"

"Ay, I knew the name; but I did not give them a thocht. I remember now, the Laird o' Strathairlie used to be down in the shooting-time, with a wild, feckless lot—loons that just consume the fruits of the airth, and never add a bawbee to the nation's wealth."

"Still, I suppose they do some good, by giving employment and spending money?"

"I'm no that sure. They create a fause demand and a useless class—men that just minister to other men's pleasure are never good for anything: there's something degrading in it. If ye come down and see me in my bit Hieland home, I hope these fine folk won't come haverin' after you. I canna be fashed wi' siclike kittle cattle."

"I don't suppose they would trouble me much, only Evelyn, who is really fond of me, I believe; and I should greatly enjoy Craigdarroch. The Highlands must be delightful, from Kenneth's account."

"Ay; he can talk grand. He is a braw laddie. You are good friends, you twa?"

"Very good. Kenneth interests me, he is so fresh and original."

"He is too self-opinionated; but he is an honest lad, and his mother, my half-sister, was aye nearest to me of my kin, though I loved your father weel till he went an' married like a fule! I must look after Kenneth and provide for him, for her sake. Her heart was bound up in him; and for a' his bone and muscle, he's no that strong."

"Yes, Uncle Sandy, you ought to take care of him. He is indeed your natural heir."

"Natural heir indeed!" quoth Uncle Sandy wrathfully. "Nae-

body is my heir or heiress beyond what I choose. I can leave all I possess to an institution or an hospital to-morrow."

"Of course you could," said Mona, indifferently.

"Then let me hear nae mair of heirs and heiresses!"

"Very well. Shall I read now?"

"Ay, and dinna go too fast."

But the lecture did not seem to give satisfaction till she came to the "Prices Current," when some of the quotations seemed to arouse a keen and pleasurable interest in her hearer.

"Ay," he muttered. "Spanish four cents, forty-eight and a quarter, ex-dividend. That's good;—time to sell. Hum! Union Pacific, three-fourths down; that will do. Where is Kenneth? He hasn't come nigh us this Sawbath."

"He said he was going to church with his friend young Macleod, and was to sup with him after."

"He's always awa' when he is wanted. Write him a note; nay, a halfpenny card will do as well. Tell him—stay, I'll write myself, though it is the Sawbath. There are some things will na' keep, and the Lord's Day is not the same this side of the border."

"Just so, uncle. When in Rome, do as Rome does."

"Ay; when will a note reach him?"

"I daresay at ten to-morrow morning."

"That will do fine. Give me my book an' the ink. I canna afford to lose time."

With many a muttered, inarticulate self-addressed comment, and a more distinct complaint of his dim eyes, his unsteady hand, his general debility and rapid decline, he managed to fill two sides of note paper, which he put in an envelope and carefully fastened up, requesting Mona to address it to her cousin. Then he sat silently watching her.

"Ye'll send it safe and sure to the post?"

"Certainly; I will go myself. The servant is out, and so is Madame Debrisay. The post-pillar is within a hundred yards."

"Ay, do—that's a kind lassie; and you'll come back to me? I am varra weary the night! Eh, but I am worn wi' poor health mair than wi' years."

Mona returned immediately, but was received with silence. The old man seemed wrapped in thought. Mona took up the paper and began to read a criticism on the last batch of novels.

"Ay, he is a braw laddie," said Uncle Sandy suddenly, as if out of his thoughts; "and I am glad you like him so weel."

"I suppose you mean Kenneth? Yes, I like him very much, and I am sorry he is obliged to be in an office. I am sure he is not happy."

"Hoots? what does he want then? To be an idle, fine gentleman, and make the grand tower maybe? He must just earn his bread by the sweat of his brow like us a'."

"But he might do so more happily behind the plough : he is not suited to a city office. Could you not find work for him on your land, or even in the Colonies?"

"I didn't think I'd ever hear you havoring that fashion. I thought you had mair sense."

"I am afraid I am weak enough to shrink so from doing what I do not like myself—that I sympathize too much with Kenneth."

"Seempathize ! eh ? Weel, sympathy is a fine feelin'."

After this he lapsed into silence, from which he only roused himself to go to bed.

The next evening, and the next, Kenneth was closeted with his uncle. After these interviews, he stayed but a very short time with Madame Debrisay and Mona—nor did they seem to exercise an enlivening effect on the young Scot ; indeed, Madame Debrisay remarked upon his depression, and surmised that he was in debt, and afraid to ask his uncle for help.

"And no wonder," added the kindly Irishwoman. "I'm sure I'd rather go into a den of raging lions, than face your uncle if I wanted money from him. I am sorry to say it, but it's wicked to grab money as tight as he does ; and I like the young man, though I don't like to see him come between his uncle and yourself."

"I do not fancy Kenneth has a debt or a money difficulty in the world ; but he does seem to have something on his mind."

The following Sunday was fine and crisp, though still and grey. Christmas was close at hand once more, and Mona was thankful to think that the year had been peaceful, and free from any fresh misfortunes.

Kenneth came immediately after the early dinner, and asked Mona to take a walk with him. She readily complied, and they were soon on their way to their favourite recreation ground, Kensington Gardens.

Kenneth was unusually silent. He answered Mona's remarks as briefly as possible, seeming embarrassed and preoccupied. At length, having skirted the round pond, they slackened their pace as they got under the shelter of the trees, and walked down the wide glade towards the Serpentine.

"What is the matter, Kenneth?" asked Mona ; "I fancy you have something on your mind. I think you might tell me. You know I take an interest in you, and sympathize with you."

"Ah ! that's just what my uncle says." This with a profound sigh. "Yes, I have something very particular to say, only I cannot say it."

"This is very unfortunate, as I want to hear it. Do you want me to break anything to Uncle Sandy?"

"No ; he knows—that is, he is at the bottom of it all."

"Are you in any trouble, Kenneth?"

"Well, indeed, and I am."

"Could I help you?"

"Maybe you might; but it's hard to tell."

"Try, Kenneth—this is getting serious—try to tell me."

"Weel!" said Kenneth, thus urged, growing very red, and speaking with a stronger accent than usual, "Uncle Sandy wants me to marry you, and I cannot, Mona. I cannot, indeed! I have pledged my troth to another young lady, and could not break my word."

Mona stopped short in utter amazement, and looked straight at her companion.

"How very unkind of you!" she exclaimed. "I did not think you would reject me."

"Eh? That's what my uncle says. He believes you are very fond o' me, but I cannot see it; and, oh! Mona, he swears he will leave all his money away from both of us if we don't marry; and I will never call any woman wife but my sweet Mary—little Mary Black—the schoolmaster's daughter!"

A kindly, amused smile slowly dimpled round Mona's mouth.

"Did you tell him so?"

"Well, I daren't, you see. I have had hopes that he (Uncle Sandy) would help me—I mean us—for I think he meant me to be his heir before he met you."

"Believe me, Kenneth, I will not interfere with you. Now, I'll help you to the best of my ability; but first—please to propose to me in due form."

"You understand I'm pledged to Mary."

"Do not mention her at present."

"Well, then; will you marry me, Mona?"

"No, Kenneth. I feel honoured by your offer, but I decidedly decline. There now the blame of disobedience rests with me. You can tell Uncle Sandy that I refused you."

"You are a clever deil, Mona, and kind; but this is not varra honest."

"No, it is not; but my uncle ought not to be so foolish as to turn matchmaker. Now he will attack me, and I can take care of myself. You can keep quiet, and by-and-by—when I have utterly refused you—then propose to marry 'your ain true love,' and my uncle will yield."

"I am not sure! Ye see, his idea is that I should marry, and live with him at Craigdarroch—that I should mind the farm, and you the house, and then come in for everything after. He'll be dreadfully disappointed, for he is awful fond of you, Mona, and I am not surprised; you are a real braw lassie. You've a lad o' your own somewhere awa', I'll be bound—a lassie like you could not want a lover."

"The place is vacant at present, Kenneth, and you see you are—*fortunately* bespoken," she said, laughing.

"Oh, but you have made my heart light!" he exclaimed. "I did not think you would have me; but Uncle Sandy was that positive, I gave in to him. Maybe if I had not left my heart behind me and taken to you, our uncle's wish might have been fulfilled."

"Just so Kenneth. As it is, we will manage our affairs as best we can."

"What can we say when we go in?"

"The position is rather strained, as politicians say. You must go and confess first. Then I suppose I shall be sent for, and I shall trust to the inspiration of the moment."

"It's awful trying," said Kenneth, who was greatly disturbed. "It will be years and years before Uncle Sandy comes round—he is so obstinate and self-opinionated. And hard as it is to wait, I could stand that; but Mr. Black is in a very weak state, and should he die, Mary and her mother would be homeless. For Jamie the eldest brother's a ne'er-do-weel, and Robbie's on the sea."

"We must try and coax Uncle Sandy to do the right thing. He would be very happy at Craigdarroch, with you and Mary to take care of him."

"You are too kind," said Kenneth, his dark eyes growing moist.

"The good God has sent you to me for a true friend and sister."

"Ah! there spoke your gratitude to me for rejecting you!" cried Mona, holding out her hand to him. "There, let us swear friendship and fidelity, and determination to guide Uncle Sandy in the way he should go."

"You are a very clever young woman. I do not know if there is a cleverer whatever. And you really will bear me no enmity because I cannot marry you?"

"I think, Kenneth, by much perseverance and 'wrestling in prayer,' as Uncle Sandy says, I may overcome the bitterness of this moment."

"Ah, Mona, you are making a mock at me. You would not, if you just knew how my heart sinks when I think what a long weary waiting lies between me and Mary."

There was profound sadness in his voice.

"But I do not mock you, Kenneth," cried Mona, touched by his tone. "I feel with and for you, and I will do my best to help you. We will manage Uncle Sandy. Now for the rest of our walk, you shall tell me all about Mary from the very first."

"Then I must begin at the beginning of my life, for Mary is just bound up with it."

"Go on," said Mona, looking up into his face with a sunny smile, and Kenneth "went on" considerably.

Mona was sincerely interested. It was but a homely tale, yet it was glorified by gleams of true feeling, of tenderness almost womanly in its delicacy, of warmest desire to shield the dear one from trouble or roughness. And then the setting of the picture among grey

rocks and purple heather, gleaming lochs, and clear brown rushing streams, soft mist, and driving storm, was delightfully suggested by Kenneth's incidental descriptions. There was a day when a "spate" was on the river and he helped Mary over the stepping-stones; another, when he landed a big salmon, while she looked on; a third, when he rowed her and her mother across the loch; and yet a fourth, when he coaxed her to wander away with him to a rent in the mountain side, called the Devil's Dyke, and a storm overtook them.

Mona listened with a curious mixed sense of sympathy and envy. Would any human being ever love her with the same deep yearning affection? How old her experiences made her feel beside this free unselfish love. How much more true manhood there was in this unstinted, generous eagerness to share all good with the best beloved, than in the cold, hard, worldly wisdom that prompted Lisle to hand over the woman he had tried to win to another, at the first chill breath of coming trouble.

Kenneth felt a new creature when he was thus enabled to unbosom himself. Thoughts uttered seem so much stronger than they do while lurking in the shadowy recesses of the heart.

By the time they reached Westbourne Villas, he had talked himself into a conviction that his wedding was not so far off after all. But at the garden gate, terrible reality grasped him and looked him in the face. Within those walls Uncle Sandy awaited him.

"He will be awful angry, Mona," whispered Kenneth, pausing before he rang the bell.

"I daresay he will"—(it was not necessary to name the object of their dread)—"but you must throw all the blame on me—remember, Kenneth, it is quite true. If there was no Mary in the case, I could not marry you."

"There will be somebody else then," he said with innocent conceit.

"Never mind about that, Kenneth. Think so if you like; but do not be too positive with Uncle Sandy. If he chooses to hope a little, let him."

When they went in, Mona retired to take off her cloak and hat, and Kenneth with slow, reluctant steps, went up to face Uncle Sandy.

"Oh, Deb!" cried Mona, throwing herself into a chair beside that good lady, who on the door being opened, hastily hid the stocking she had been darning under the table. "Oh, Deb, support me! I have been cruelly and heartlessly rejected by Kenneth Macalister."

"Why! *Grand Dieu!* What do you mean?" asked Madame Debrisay impatiently, while she hunted vigorously for her needle. "Ah! here it is! Now don't talk riddles and conundrums."

Whereupon Mona repeated the substance of her conversation with Kenneth.

"Why what has come to that cantankerous cripple, your uncle,

hat he should think of such a marriage for you ? That long-legged Highlander isn't fit to wipe your shoes—a creature that has only exchanged his native wilds for a den of thieves in the City. Why he isn't fit to sit in the same room with you. You know I have always stood up for your uncle, even when there was no denying he is a *aygur*”—(Irish for mean miser)—“but I wash my hands of him now.”

“You are too indignant,” began Mona ; but Madame did not heed her.

“I would like him to see you as I have, in the most distinguished society in London, with the most distinguished men in it at your feet.”

“He would need an enormously magnifying power of perception if he ever beheld such a sight as that,” said Mona laughing. “Nor will I allow you to speak contemptuously of Kenneth. He is a fine fellow and a true gentleman—far truer than the distinguished individuals you fancy you saw at my feet. He is deeply attached to a Highland Mary of his own, and we have agreed to bring round Uncle Sandy to agree to the match. Poor Uncle Sandy had evidently intended to make Kenneth his heir. Now he has met me, he wants to make all straight by uniting our rival claims and ourselves.”

“Claims indeed ! Why you are his nearest of kin and ought to have all he has, except, perhaps a legacy to buy a plough or a fishing rod for his cateran of a nephew. Not that I dislike the boy. He is a good-looking, well-disposed fellow. But this notion of your uncle's is a dreadful dilemma. It is quite possible he will take offence at you both, and maybe leave everything he possesses to the kirk—kirk or church thy are all alike for grabbing gold. I hate priests of every denomination !” concluded the good-natured heathen, recommencing her darning with such fierce energy that she pricked her finger, whereat she indulged in some very strong French expressions.

“There is Uncle Sandy's bell. Do come with me, Deb. You will be a shield both to Kenneth and myself.”

“Ah ! can't you let me finish my stockings in peace. *Le vieux Tartufe* would faint at the sight of needle and thread on the Sabbath, and I haven't a minute to myself other days. I daresay if he could make sixpence-halfpenny by skinning a flint on the ‘Sawbath,’ he'd find it was the interests of true ‘releegion’ to do so.”

“Come, come, Deb. Uncle Sandy has plenty of faults and crotchets, but you shall not paint him blacker than he is. Why have you turned against him ?”

“He hasn't a spark of true generosity. You gave up time and teaching for him, and what did he do for you ?”

“He offered to pay my losses.”

“Ah ! what was a paltry three pounds ? Is he the man to say,

'Here's a fifty pound note, my darlin', to buy you a frock—though nothing could ever pay for the light of your sweet face beside me that would be like a Christian.'

"The wildest dreams of fancy could not depict Uncle Sandy making such a speech; and, Deb, though he may be able to live with a certain degree of comfort, it does not follow he is rich."

"Oh! he could not live without heaping up riches."

"Come along, and be reasonable."

It was an agreeable surprise to find Uncle Sandy not cross only a little melancholy. He was low about himself, and commissioned Kenneth to interview the secretary of the funeral company and ascertain what would be the cost of removing a "corp" to the old kirkyard at Strathairlie." Finally he made Madame Debris feel unhappily prophetic, by telling him to seek out the minister of Balmuir, whom Kenneth had met in Cheapside a few days before and request him to call on a former parishioner.

CHAPTER XIII.

DIPLOMACY.

KENNETH MACALISTER lost no time in giving Mona the result of his dreaded interview with Uncle Sandy.

He was not, Kenneth said, so vexed as might have been expected. He told his nephew not to be down-hearted; that his offer was, perhaps, unexpected like, and he could not suppose a lassie—a very superior young lady—would jump at the first word,—that he (Kenneth) must persevere, and come often to the house—perseverance could accomplish much. Uncle Sandy had set his pertinacious mind on the marriage. All, however, might go well, if only no breath of the project reached Mary's ears.

"I am exceedingly glad I may go and see you often," conclude Kenneth. "For this great stony wilderness of a town has seemed a good deal more home-like since I knew you."

Things then went on in much the usual routine for some months. Mr. Craig grew stronger, and able to hobble to and fro at different kirks from that which he at first attended—the minister being known to his brother cleric of Balmuir, who, by the way, never made his appearance at Westbourne Villas. A letter introducing Uncle Sandy was forwarded to the former, so the two Scotsmen enjoyed an occasional "crack" together, which sometimes ended in a somewhat acrimonious dispute.

Mr. Craig, as the busy season advanced, complained a good deal of his lonely days; but Madame Debrisay, who rose in his estimation as she grew more self-asserting and less complaisant, explained to

him that, with the strong necessity of earning her bread and forming a *clientele*, Mona was bound to take as many pupils as she could get.

On this Mr. Craig fell into a brown study, and in the evening, when Mona went to read to him, expressed regret that he had let Craighdarroch for so long a time, adding

"I might as well be there as here, for all the company I get."

"At least I can read to you in the evening, Uncle Sandy."

"Ay, I know it's not your fault! Do you think you would like to live at Craighdarroch?"

"Certainly, in the summer. I am not so sure about the winter-time; unfortunately, there are no pupils to be found there."

"If you had a good husband, you would not need them."

"But as you would say, uncle, a husband nowadays is ill to seek."

"You might have a brow one for the taking," said Uncle Sandy, looking keenly at her.

This was the first approach he had ever made to the dreaded subject, and Mona, though by no means deficient in courage, shrank from it.

"It is a serious matter to take anyone for a husband," she said, colouring. "I like my liberty."

"Liberty is no good for women," he returned, for Uncle Sandy had by no means a high estimation of the fair sex. "And Mona, my lassie, your old uncle's heart is set on seeing you a happy wife."

"Thank you, uncle, I should like to please you, but we must be sure of the happiness."

He opened his mouth to reply, but some wave of thought arrested his words, and he closed it again. He was, however, cross and contradictory all the evening, and Mona knew he was not well pleased.

Meanwhile the usual round of London life ran its course. Parliament assembled. New players and old favorites enchanted the public. Fresh scandals, and novelties of toilettes, enlivened the pages of society papers. Another batch of little girls were promoted from the nursery to the school-room, and both Madame Debrisay and Mona's hands were full.

Lady Finistoun's name at drawing-room, dinner, ball, and garden-party frequently met Mona's eye as she looked through the papers for the articles most suited for Uncle Sandy's consumption. Yet she made no sign. Kind and pleasant though she was when face to face with her friend, the rush of the season, the number of attractive engagements, crowded out those who were not constantly present with her, from Evelyn's mind.

She did write once, begging Mona to come and have a cup of tea with her at an hour when she would not meet anyone, but Mona thought it wiser not to go.

"If you stay late in London, I will come when the tide of gaiety is ebbing. You would hardly have time to speak to me while it is the flood," she wrote in reply.

By some slip in conversation, Madame Debrisay managed to make this invitation, and the reply, known to Mr. Craig, who seemed a good deal impressed by it.

May set in with unusual warmth, dry east winds prevailing, and Uncle Sandy grew discontented with his food, restless at night, feverish by day, dissatisfied with his liver, and suspicious of his digestive organs.

"I am not sae sure that Sir Andrew Colman gives me that attention he ought, sidering a' the guineas he has had from me ! Mr. Maclean" (this was the minister) "advises me to try that man in Saville Row, Dr. Carmichael ; they say he is wonderful for liver and digestion ; and I am regular out of sorts."

"Well I would, Mr. Craig," said Madame Debrisay, to whom Uncle Sandy confided his doubts and intentions ; "you have not been looking at all well—not a bit like yourself of late. I have felt rather uneasy about you. Perhaps a new doctor may observe something that has escaped the other. Maybe change of air might do you good."

"Haven't I had a total change coming here ? and last year I felt a knew man ! How is a puir frail body like me to go wandering about by my ain sell ? Why the cure wad be worse than the sickness."

"Still, my dear sir, it is well worth while to face some difficulties rather than not recover your precious health."

"I know it—I know it," he growled impatiently ; "and I am just thinking what's best to be done. I'll get Mona to write and ask for an appointment, when she comes in."

"I am sure, Mr. Craig, my poor pen is quite at your service."

"Oh, thank'ee, thank'ee ; I'll just wait till my niece comes in."

Mr. Craig was quite nervous about his visit to a new doctor, and at length expressed a wish that Madame Debrisay should accompany him to the doctor's house, though he did not wish her to be present at the interview.

"Why did you not say so at once ?" she cried, "I should have offered to go with you, but seeing you are a particular man, I did not like to intrude."

"Intrude ! Why, no, of course you would not. I did think of taking my nephew, but it is not easy for him to get away from business."

"Do not think of it, my dear sir. I am, you know, quite an experienced nurse, and when Dr. Carmichael makes an appointment, I will arrange to go with you. You are not really fit to go alone."

"You are varra good. I shall be much indebted to you."

For the remainder of the day Uncle Sandy was amiable enough ; but, as is not uncommon, when the immediate sense of obligation wears off, the politeness it engenders also disappears, and next day Uncle Sandy was as querulous as ever.

"I believe his digestion is all wrong, poor man, and his eyes are

like boiled gooseberries, but there is nothing else the matter with him. He is shaky on his legs, certainly, though I rather think that's just nervous fancies. I doubt his dying before he is a hundred, he is so contradictory."

"Why, Deb, you would not cut short his little span of life? If I thought you were serious, I should be quite angry with you."

"I would not do the poor soul the smallest harm, God knows; but he is very trying, and I don't think he cares a straw about any mortal but himself."

"I think he cares a good deal about himself, but he is affectionate too. He is fond of me; he begins to cling to me, I am almost sorry to say, for in some measure it binds me to him. One cannot desert a creature that depends on you. Still, he is not an enlivening companion."

"All I hope is he will not prove an ungrateful old hunk after you have sacrificed your youth to him."

"My youth, Deb? I feel as if my youth had gone—quite gone."

"Ah! what nonsense you talk! Gone, only to come back again. My dear child, there's been more wrong with you than the death of your poor dear grandmother, or the loss of your fortune, or even your rejection of that poor fellow."

"Is that not a sufficient catalogue, Deb? What more do you want?" and Mona sat down to work, but really to think.

Since Kenneth's confession, she had thought more of Waring than she had ever done before. Did he love her with the same honest, enduring love that the young Highlander bore to his Mary? Hardly. Kenneth and Mary had grown up together, and the power of association was interwoven with the warmth of early passion. Then a simple life of duty and enforced self-denial deepens the channels of the heart, while an existence of mere pleasure, of constant friction with calculating, cynical men of the world, has an indurating effect. The emotions and affections spread thinly in a shallow stream over a stony surface, through which no fertilising drops can percolate to the hollow beneath. Still, the impression remained with her that there were possibilities of true tenderness in Waring, which might have made her life happy, had her wounds not been so sore and recent that they could not endure the touch of a new love. She never regretted having broken with him, but she grieved to think that from a wish to provide for her grandmother, she had caused him so much pain. The recollection, too, of his aspect when she had accidentally seen him in the street, haunted her. Could her refusal have influenced him for evil?

The day that Uncle Sandy went to consult the well-known Dr. Carmichael, Mona was rather late, and went up to his sitting-room before she took off her hat.

She found him at his evening meal—a chop and some dry toast—

while Madame Debrisay was busy over a cup of cocoa, which she was making with the help of a kettle and spirit lamp.

"Well, uncle, what did the doctor say?"

"Not much. He evidently thinks I am in a bad way. He went so far as to say that medicine could do me varra little good. He just altered my diet a bit. I am not to touch tea or coffee, only a wee drap whiskey in cold water; and he has ordered me to a foreign place I never heard tell of before. That's the worst. If I'm to dee, let me have one of my ain to close my eyes. Out of London I will not go, unless you come with me, Mona."

"My dear uncle, this is very serious. Where are you to go?"

"To a queer, out-of-the-way water-drinking toun c'ad Con ter-x-ville, away in France. Madame there seems to know about it as she does about most things."

Mona looked at her.

"Yes, dear," cried madame briskly, as she blew out the lamp, and carried the cup to the invalid. "The waters are admirable for gout, and rheumatism, and liver, and indigestion, and all sorts of things. It is a well-known water in France. Monsieur Le Duc de Monceau and Madame La Marquise de Suresnes both derived the greatest benefit from the cure."

"And whereabouts is it?"

"Oh, on the German side; in the Department of the Vosges, not very far from Nancy."

"It's an awfu' lang journey," groaned Uncle Sandy, "and will cost a mine o' siller."

"Not more than a journey to any other health resort, my dear Mr. Craig. We will ascertain the rail fares. You are not going away all in a minute. We have time enough to look about us."

"And will you come with me, dearie?" asked Uncle Sandy, looking wistfully at Mona. "I *canna* go without you!"

"If I can go I will, uncle; but I must hear a little more."

"It's just awfu' to be alone in this wicked world, and neither chick nor child to fight for you. You ought to think on that, Mona; and get me a little mair toast, like a good lassie—my appetite is verra indifferent."

"He has just devoured a rackful!" whispered Madame Debrisay; "one round more is as much as he ought to have."

Mona waited downstairs till the toast was ready, considering what answer she should make to her uncle's request, though she well knew that she would end by accompanying him. How could she refuse the poor old man, who seemed to look to her for help and comfort? Yet how much pleasanter it would be to stay and work, and be free with Madame Debrisay!

When she carried back the toast, and Uncle Sandy had finished it, he said he could have a little sleep if he were left quiet, and *would make up his mind* what he would do next day.

Madame Debrisay and her young *protegee* held high counsel it should be done.

Overcoming her reluctance, yet made up her mind to accompany

young, you see, Deb ; and after a few months' absence, I pick up my pupils again."

"Doubt you could, dear," cried Madame Debrisay ; "anyway, present things to him in a proper light. If he drags you out of your employment, he ought to make a settlement upon what I am afraid of, is that he will spoil your prospects and leave you in the lurch. I can't get over the notion that young Macall come in for everything."

"Do not try to drive a bargain about me, Deb ! I must do what I can. If poor Uncle Sandy never were to leave me a sou, I would not refuse him my company or my help. '*Fais ce que doit*," said she, "*le que pourra.*'"

"It's all very fine to do what you ought, come what may ! But Uncle Sandy always takes care of those who take care of them-

have not acted on that principle yourself, Deb ; neither must let me go, and leave the morrow take care of itself."

On the following Mr. Craig spent in gloomy silence ; and when Macalister came in the evening, contrary to his usual custom, a message was sent to request the ladies would come and see him. Kenneth remained till Mr. Craig's bedtime, and then he went in on Madame Debrisay and Mona for a few moments.

His uncle was much depressed, and in a very bad temper. He himself seemed pre-occupied, and by no means in good spirits. He said he would be up again in an evening or two, and his tone was rather significant.

The next day Uncle Sandy had brisked up again. He begged her to come to him as soon as she returned from her work, which he intended to terminate earlier on that day than on any other.

He pressed what that invitation meant, and only hoped that no more Kenneth would add to her difficulties. Yet she felt extremely reluctant to give up the increasing independence of her position—to be the nurse and companion to so uncertain a patient as her uncle. True, she was often weary after a day of condescending—often irritated and discouraged by careless, stupid questions—but her day's troubles ended with the last lesson, and the quiet of their homelike lodgings and the sympathy of her devoted friends awaited her.

Her father, the old man sorely needed her help, and she would not

on as she had changed her dress, for the day was wet and she went upstairs, and found her uncle seated near the fire, drawn up beside his chair, and on it a map, a guide-book,

Continental Bradshaw, and several scraps of ruled paper covered with figures.

"Come awa' ! come awa' !" he cried, his brow clearing ; "I'm wearyin' to talk to you. My puir head is just dazed with trying to understand whaur I'm going, and what it will cost me !"

"As to where you are going, uncle, I may help you to find out ; but as to the cost, you must ask Madame Debrisay ; she knows all about French railways."

"And when will she be in ?"

"Not till six, or half-past."

"Aweel, I have something quite private to say to your own self, and I'd best tackle that first."

He stopped abruptly, and began to gather up the papers and books somewhat nervously.

"I am all attention, uncle."

"It's a delicate matter to speak aboot, but I feel bound to do it, for your ain good, and—and benefit ; and so I'll just speak my mind."

This with some hesitation, ending with a sudden assumption of resolution, steadily avoiding his neice's eyes at the same time.

"Certainly, Uncle Sandy."

"There's that lad Kenneth," he went on, in his thin, high-pitched, querulous voice ; "a fine young man, steady and weel disposed ; what for canna you mak' up your mind to wed him ? He's awfu' fond o' you, and ye seem good friends together. Why canna you mak' it up ?"

"I thought," returned Mona gravely and calmly, though she felt that the tug of war had come ; "I thought I told Kenneth that though I liked and valued him, I feared I could not give him wifely affection. He ought to have been satisfied."

"And wha wad tak' a lassie's first 'no' ?"

"First or last, my dear uncle, my answer would be the same."

"And what hinders you frae liking him for your husband ?"

"Who can tell uncle ? perhaps liking him too well in another way."

"Ah ! but I am sorry for the puir lad. He is varra fond o' ye."

"Well, yes, I think he likes me, but I do not think he would ever have asked me to be his wife of his own free will. It was to please you, uncle."

"Ah, ah ! Is it a bit jealousy ? Don't you think he loves you weel enough ?"

"No, uncle. I would never accept him."

"Dinna say it !" cried Uncle Sandy earnestly. "I am just in a difficulty. Ye see, I always promised to look after Kenneth before I knew I should ever see my poor brother's girlie. Aweel, I'd like to leave my bit o' money to both of you, and ye see, if you wed, it would be keepit together."

"Dear uncle," said Mona, smiling, "do not let that trouble you. I save everything you like to Kenneth; men want money much more than women, and I am young. I think I can earn my own bread with Madame Debrisay's help; so do not let any thought of me interfere with Kenneth. I have made up my mind to be your escort to Contrexeville, and I hope you will return so well as to be quite independent of us all."

"Eh! that will never be, my lassie—never! But you have disappointed me; only I don't give up yet. I have just set my heart on a match between you and Kenneth. Eh! we'd a' be happy at Craigdarroch; he'd look to the lands and the beasties, and you would mind the hoose and watch your puir auld uncle's last days. Then I would be yours—I'd know you were both settled and comfortable, and that the place would be in the hands o' my ain kin."

"Yes; it would be a very pleasant arrangement. I wish I could encourage you to hope for its completion."

"I dinna like unreasonable contradiction, an' I will not put up with it," said Uncle Sandy angrily. "What for will you be so foolish?"

"Do you believe that human love is the growth of human will, uncle?"

"I'm sure I canna tell." He paused and thought for a moment, a change passing over his face. "Yes; but I did though," he said. "I tried hard to keep frae loving my old master's daughter, and I could not. Eh! I had a sair heart in those days. I daured na speak, for she was a rich heiress, and I but a puir lad. Yet I think—I always thought she cast a kindly look upon me. However, there came a grand gentleman from England, and they married her to him. She did not live long after. Maybe she'd have had a longer and a happier life if she had been my wife, and lived in her ain country."

Mona listened with a curious mixture of sympathy and amusement. There was true pathos in his voice; yet the evident self-conceit that made him quite sure he had but to ask to be accepted, struck her as too comical when she gazed at his insignificant, shrunken figure, his short, shrewd face, and contemptuously upturned nose. Had he ever been a man on whom a lady might have loved to look? Still there was at times a kindly expression about his mouth which belied the keen hardness of his eyes.

"Yes, uncle," she said softly, "it must have been a trying time. That useless struggle ought to teach you how hard it is to govern unruly wills and affections, and to leave Kenneth and me to follow our own devices."

"Answer me one question. Have you a fancy for any other man, or are you pledged to any other?"

"Neither, uncle; I can assure you unhesitatingly."

"Aweel then, I'll just possess my soul with patience; but it's bad takin' you awa, just when you and the lad are good company to each other; but I must, I must, and I canna go without you."

"Never mind, uncle. Whether we 'keep company' or not, it will all come to the same in the end."

Uncle Sandy kept silence for a moment or two, and his brow contracted; but there was something in Mona's indescribable superiority—her kindly, gentle, but distinct independence—that he dared not flout.

"Weel, weel!" he said at length; "you'll come with me, anyhow?"

"Yes, certainly, uncle. Just make up your mind when you will start, and I will make due preparation."

Here Madame Debrisay made her appearance, and sentiment was merged in finance.

Uncle Sandy was positively aghast at the torrent of information poured forth by the capable Franco-Irishwoman.

"Let me see"—pulling over the map—"Contrexéville? I can't make it out here, but I was at Domreny once—when my poor husband was alive—and it's not far from Contrex. I daresay the fare will be close on forty francs—that's eighty for the two of you—and the through fare by Calais—you must take the shortest route, Dieppe or Havre would be the death of you—is something like seventy-two, say seventy—that's a hundred and forty, and a night in Paris, sixty or seventy; and cabs, and *fiacres*, and luggage, and *douceurs*, and refreshments on the way, will run into fifty or fifty-five more; that's a hundred and forty, and eighty; two hundred and twenty, and sixty; two hundred and eighty—three hundred and forty in round numbers."

"Lord's sake, woman!" cried Uncle Sandy, startled out of all propriety, "if you are counting by hundreds, I'd better stay here and dee, while I have siller left to carry my puir body back to Strathairlie."

"Oh, don't take fright, my dear sir; remember the hundreds do not represent pounds. I'll tell you the total in English money; we will just make it three hundred and fifty to save time and trouble (that is, reckoning four pounds to the hundred francs, and you may get a trifle more if the exchange is favourable), that is just fourteen pounds—first-class to Paris, and second on to Contrexéville."

"Ah!" he returned with a sigh; "that is possible, though it is desperate costly; and as much more to come back. Twenty-eight pounds sterling—for how long?—less than a month."

"Perhaps, my dear Mr. Craig, you might feel equal to prolong your ramble, and go on into Germany; a little change of scene and—and diet might have a most beneficial effect."

"Perhaps, if *she* will come wi' me," pointing to Mona.

"Of course she will. She might as well,—breaking up now, she cannot expect to get any more pupils this year."

"Oh, indeed!" returned Uncle Sandy, in an aggrieved tone.

"Mona, my love! there is a letter for you down stairs. You had

and see if it needs an answer." Mona obeyed. "I am
forgive me, my dear Mr. Craig, if from my deep interest
concerns Mona, I venture to take a liberty. As the dear
ing to act a daughter's part to you, I hope you will see the
of being a parent to her; and as you have never known
young ladies and their requirements, you must suffer me to
at a nice little allowance—to enable her to dress as becomes
ted daughter—would be—"

"broke in Uncle Sandy, in his strongest accent; "I will
it! Wha said I was going to adopt her? You have just
rra great liberty."

sorry to have offended," said Madame Debrisay stiffly;
nsidered it my duty to one I look upon as a child of my
["Eh! she has an adopted mother as weel's a father!" he
h a sneer],—"to inform you that the very small sum I
er," continued Madame Debrisay, not heeding the inter-
'would be soon exhausted were she to draw on it for her
xpenses; and I think you ought—"

much obliged to you, madame, for telling me what I ought
errupted Uncle Sandy again, in high wrath. "I never
my instruction as to my duty in this life. I shall do what
ght by my niece, and you needn't interfere. If I thought
y act or part in this attempt to extort money from me,
isown her."

t money, indeed!" cried Madame Debrisay. "Those are
have no right to address to me. Extort money! I am
to give money away than to extort it. When your niece
ted by everyone because she would not sell herself to a
r marriage, did I count that it would cost me to keep her
ier in? No, I was proud and happy—"

a mercenary marriage!" broke in Uncle Sandy, his indig-
erged in sharp curiosity. "Wha—what do you mean?
efuse a man?"

a rich man, and a real gentleman," returned Madame
recovering herself, and perceiving she had made a false move.
she's fa'en love wi' another lad?"

'cried Madame Debrisay, as if a new light had broken in
; "that must be it. My dear sir, you have the furthest
us all, and"—laughing good-humouredly—"I am really
of my own folly, talking to a man of your stamp about what
; or ought not to do; you really must excuse me. I have
met a man of your intelligence and penetration, so you
ive my stupidity, and give me plenary absolution."

r no malice," said Uncle Sandy, with dignity, "and I know
for a woman to keep her tongue quiet. Least said, soonest

Let's say nae mair about it. It had not best come to
rs."

"Trust me, I shall not breathe a syllable to her; and I will go and prepare your cocoa. Let me shake hands with you, my dear sir."

Having done so, Madame Debrisay left the room, murmuring to herself as she descended the stairs,—“Stingy, cross-grained, cantankerous old miser! He thinks he can set the Thames on fire.”

While Uncle Sandy, reclining a conqueror in his easy-chair, musing on the altercation, “A hasty, stormy woman,” was his mental verdict, “but no devoid o’ sense.”

CHAPTER XIV.

CONTREXEVILLE.

FINALLY all things were arranged, or arranged themselves; and one fine morning in June, Uncle Sandy (to whom it was no difficulty to get up “in the middle of the night,” as Madame Debrisay said) and Mona were ready at an early hour—packed and breakfasted—to start by the morning train for Dover, *en route* to Paris.

“I do not know how I’ll live without you,” said Madame Debrisay, embracing Mona, with fast-flowing tears. “I was all right before you came, but now I know what it is to have you by me! It will be awfully lonesome when you are gone.”

“And how I shall miss you, dearest Deb! You know I am half afraid of the task I have undertaken! It is a serious matter to be bear leader to Uncle Sandy.”

“That it is! But you will do well! Above all, hold your own. If you give in, h’ll be sure to trample on you. And you will write to me every week?”

“I will, dear Deb; and you must answer. Good-bye! God bless you!”

“We’ll just miss our train,” called Uncle Sandy from the cab.

The journey across the Channel and to the capital of fair France is now a twice-told—nay a thrice-told-tale, familiar to every “‘Arry and his ‘Arriet.” Nevertheless it was fraught with excitement and delight to Uncle Sandy’s experience. The fair hop fields of Kent, the white cliffs and blue glittering waters of the Channel at Dover, the Admiralty Pier, the castle-crowned heights, the lowering of somebody’s carriage on to the deck, all afforded him matter for wonder and admiration.

Hitherto his travels were limited to Glasgow, Ardcachan (where the factory was situated in which he had risen to be foreman and manager), and Strathairlie. When he came to London he had taken the night train, so every step of this new way was a novelty.

But the marvel of marvels was to land at Calais, and not understand a word spoken by the chattering crowd around him. Then, indeed, he clung to his niece’s arm, and was abjectly civil to the polite interpreter who travelled with the train.

, who had been somewhat nervous about conveying her invale such a distance, was surprised and relieved to find how of scene drew him out of himself, and how many of his in- vanished because he had not time to think of them.

was glad, however, to get him safe to the hotel recommended ame Debrisay, which was half-way between the Gare du Nord

Gar de l'Est—a thoroughly French house, where they found an waiter who spoke English, but who had some difficulty in anding Uncle Sandy's.

old man was quite exhausted, and went to bed as soon as he taken of some food.

"I'll pit your purse under your pillow, dearie," he said tremu- "and lock your door; and here, my lambie, here are ten gns. They are for your ain self; and when you want more, me. I dinna wish you to want for onything, only I would talked out o' siller. Eh! it's wonderful to hear ye talk outlandish folk in their ain tongue. I wish I had had mair 'in my youth."

ank you, dear uncle, you are very good! Now you must get o. I have lit a night-light, and my room is next yours. If you ock at the door, I will come to you."

strange it was to be in Paris once more, after four or five bsence; and under what different circumstances!

grandmother, though most careful of money, understood what cost, and what must be paid for. Moreover, she had the old- ed idea that girls could not be trusted. That they were pretty, s children, to be penned up, and kept from soiling their deli- gers, or brushing off the pearly freshness of infantile ignor- ll a purchaser (i.e., a husband) was found for such precious

Therefore Mona's reminiscences of former travel presented level of carefully-guarded and complete security, to which esent somewhat troublesome responsibility formed by com- a proud preferment. The past had its pleasures as well as is, but both had left a sting behind. This, however, she was ul to perceive, was losing its venom.

could think of Lisle without emotion, and look back with the tying, half-amused indulgence of an elder for the weakness of r to the strong attraction he had possessed for her. At least l succeeded in concealing this from him, and now they would ly never meet again.

these ideas floating in her brain she fell asleep, having given isite orders for their early start the following morning.

journey was tedious, for the country was somewhat uninter-

and Mona, being a stranger in that part of the land, could ply information as she had done during the previous day.

Sandy bemoaned the heat, the cost, the weariness of travel; niece was truly glad when they reached a shabby little sta-

tion in a rather flat but prettily-wooded country, and everyone out.

A brisk struggle for the passengers occurred between the *coteurs* of the various omnibuses, *char à bones*, etc., which awaited the arrival of the train; and outside the station yard was a gathering of the peasant inhabitants of the village—the men in blue, the women in nice white caps and aprons—staring at the strangers deposited at their gates, loudly discussing their appearance in voices and with many gestures.

"It ought to be a wonderful cure to come this weary long for it!" groaned Uncle Sandy, as he descended from their carriage when it stopped before the entrance of the *établissement*.

Then came the business of finding rooms and arranging. This was simplified by a letter of introduction obtained by Mr. Debrisay from a mutual friend, to M. le Directeur, who spoke to them, and, to Mr. Craig's infinite joy, proved to be an excellent English scholar. Mona thought her uncle would have embraced him when he addressed them in their native tongue.

Who that has lately visited Contrexéville does not know M. le Directeur, and remember him with pleasure? Watchful to contribute by care and judicious regulations to the welfare of the human visitor, considerate and fatherly in his thought for the weak and suffering, almost ubiquitous in his ceaseless vigilance—his grave manners and kindly, strongly-marked face make him ever welcome to old and young!

The sight of the weakly, querulous old man, who seemed far helpless than he really was, under the care of such a delicately-tinted-looking creature as Mona, appealed to the aboriginal chivalry of his nature, and from the moment of their meeting all difficulties vanished.

The next day saw Uncle Sandy duly inaugurated into the service of water-drinking, douches, and massage.

Mona found her duties as adopted daughter by no means light. At six o'clock she was expected to be ready to give her arm to her uncle, and assist his progress to the spring; to walk with him and fro between the tumblers of water; to translate his grumblings to the bath attendant and the "masseur"; to explain the inability of his eating the ornamental savoury dishes at the *table d'hôte*—in short, though M. le Directeur and the Doctor both spoke understood English, there were a hundred-and-one trifles which required Mona's intervention every day in the week, besides the ordinary task of reading aloud the leaders in the *Scotsman*, which was forwarded to him regularly, and writing the few letters which he needed to despatch. For part of Uncle Sandy's illness his health consisted of a belief that a slight tremulousness in his hands was an indication of spine disease, creeping paralysis, and various other maladies, according as they came to his knowledge,

The few years which had intervened between his retirement from business, on the death of the last original partner, and its passing to other hands, were passed by him in the seclusion of his Highland home, and in the sedulous study of his own health. This had been impaired by a sharp attack of rheumatic fever, not long before he had taken up his abode at Craigdarroch. His mental condition was therefore as he imagined, and probably it was only his meeting with Mona, and her subsequent companionship, which saved him from becoming a confirmed hypochondriac. From this he had so far been preserved by a little quiet and eminently successful speculation, by which he had largely increased the fortune derived from his own savings, and the large bequest of the head of the firm, an old bachelor, who fondly hoped that Sandy Craig would remain in the house, and carry on the business according to the old tradition of the establishment. But the advent of new men was too much for the elderly junior partner's faith. He could not, he said, trust his stair-earned siller to the whim-whams of young men," so he took his capital out of the concern; again, at the first check in his cautious speculations, he at once held his hand, and was content to let his "siller" lie comparatively fallow, thereby depriving his dull life of its one spark of excitement.

Contrexéville is a pleasant place. It boasts two tennis lawns, where chance English and American visitors sometimes lent animation to the scene; also, an archery ground, a shooting-gallery, a theatre, and a *salle de danse*.

Occasionally Mona enjoyed a game of tennis, as an English family, consisting of father, mother, two daughters, and a hobble-hoy son, made very friendly advances, and frequently invited her to join them when they played.

The father, a stout, red-faced sufferer from gout, made friends with Uncle Sandy, and many were their arguments, as Mr. Clapton was a strong Conservative, and his wife a dame of the Primrose League, while Mr. Craig was an advanced Liberal, not to say a radical of the most virulent description. This little excitement largely helped the cure, and Uncle Sandy was reluctantly obliged to admit that he felt considerably better.

"How well mademoiselle your niece plays the tennis!" said M. Directeur, taking his seat on the bench where Uncle Sandy and Mr. Clapton had already placed themselves under the shade of some trees, and in view of the tennis courts. "Do not derange yourselves, gentlemen, I pray you!" he continued. "I like to look at Miss Craig, her attitudes are so graceful. She seems like the spirit of the game, yet she is so quiet and *posee*, and gentle at other times. Truly she is a young girl to be proud of, and I make you my compliments." He bowed low to her uncle, while Mr. Clapton endorsed the eulogium by a short emphatic "Deuced fine girl, 'pon my soul!"

The heart of Alexander Craig swelled within him. Perhaps of all the ingredients in his character, pride contributed the largest share, and that pride had been sorely let and hindered all the years of his youth. He would have been completely soured by this constant repression, but his devout belief in himself. To find that any one belonging to him should call forth the praise and admiration of the beholders, was a source of delicious gratification, and Mona's merits assumed larger proportions in his eyes as M. le Directeur spoke.

"Eh, she's a good lassie! She is my puir brother's only child, and I look on her as my ain bairn, as she'll find when I am released from the sufferings of this mortal life."

There was a constant struggle in Mr Craig's mind, between a desire to hide the fact that he was in easy circumstances, and a wish to command the respect due to a man whose pockets were well lined.

"And a very nice daughter she must be," cried Mr. Clapton, accepting a cigar from M. le Directeur.

"The most charming of companions is a dear daughter," said the latter; "the constant presence of a sweet young girl sheds a light of tender purity on her father's life, such as nothing else produces."

He continued to gaze at Mona with a soft, pensive smile.

"Oh! Ah! Yes! But they manage to run up deuced long bills," returned the Englishman.

"That's what should never be permitted! exclaimed Uncle Sandy energetically. "No woman that ever lived could talk me into paying a bill! I would na mind giving her siller—cash" (correcting himself) "to buy her bit duds beforehand; but bills—na, na!"

"Monsieur has much force of character," said M. le Directeur, smiling. "But he would find it very difficult to say no to so charming a young lady as your niece."

"Should I?" cried Uncle Sandy, tossing up his chin; "let her try me, and she'll soon find out if I can or not."

"I expect some very distinguished compatriots of yours," resumed M. le Directeur; "the Lord Fitzallan and a companion arrive to-morrow, and Sir William Arty—I think he has been Lord Mayor, a man of high position—he and miladi, his wife, they come to-morrow. It is well that the tennis lawn looks bright; you energetic English, you love games to the last."

"Fitzallan," repeated Mr. Craig. "I know!—he is my tenant; he has had my house in the Highlands for a considerable time."

"Indeed!" said both hearers.

And from that moment Uncle Sandy was raised to the rank of a millionaire.

The set was now over, and Mona's side had lost, in spite of her

good play. The hour for Uncle Sandy's afternoon walk in the adjoining wood was at hand, so he beckoned her to him, not a little delighted to exercise overtly a father's rights over an elegant-looking girl who bore the unmistakable stamp of the Upper Ten—a class against which he raved theoretically.

"Ah!" said he, as he toddled (a common expression, but extremely expressive of Uncle Sandy's peculiar gait) along, with the help of a stick and an umbrella, beside his niece; "the Director has been telling me there are some grand folk coming to-morrow; then you'll see how little time and attention he'll be able to spare for such as you and me!"

"I have been greatly mistaken in M. Delorme, if their presence makes any difference to him," she returned.

"Weel, you'll see; young things like you think everyone is an angel that speaks a kind word. When my Liddy Mayoress arrives, the roses and posies he has been handing you so politely every morning will all go to her leddyship!"

"Well, perhaps so! I don't suppose I have more penetration than my neighbours; but I am quite fond of M. le Directeur, so I hope he will not allow any ladyship, however grand, to cut me out! I shall be deeply wounded if he does!"

"You are a foolish bairn! Now, Mona, I don't like any poor, meeserable creature—just like ourselves—that's a' puffed up wi' a handle to her name; I don't like her to show finer feathers than my brother's daughter, so if you want a braw new gownd, you get it, my bairn; only tell me the cost beforehand!"

"You are very good and generous, uncle; but I do not need anything. I had some of my last year's dresses done up before we came away; and I actually do not fear comparison, even with so exalted a personage as a Lady Mayoress," said Mona, laughing.

"That's a' richt; it's weel to have a proper spirit. We are tauld that we must not allow pride to master our hearts; but proper pride is no' included; and I have always held myself to be as good as any ither mon."

The following day, shortly before the hour for *table d'hôte*, the stagnant waters of life at Contrexéville were stirred by the arrival of my Lord Fitzallan, his valet, his friend—a young man—and his valet; a pile of luggage, including gun-cases, fishing-rods, a couple of dogs, and endless impedimenta of various kinds. Every waiter in the place appeared absorbed in the bustle created by this important arrival; and the visitors, as they assembled for dinner, talked of nothing else. The great men had signified their gracious intention of dining with the general public, and their places were being busily got ready, champagne bottles put into coolers, and extra dainties for dessert being placed at their end of the table.

"It's just a humeeliating spectacle," said Uncle Sandy, taking

his seat and unfolding his napkin, while his very nose seemed curl up with contemptuous disapprobation, "to see such a like out over two leddies that would be better earning their crust."

"I fancy, from what I have heard, Lord Fitzallan is by no means young."

"Why? What do ye ken about him?"

Before she could reply, the door opened, and the new guests, conducted by the manager of the hotel, entered. The first was a thin, very thin man, of forty-five or fifty, whose colouring was tremely neutral. His hair was of light hay colour; his moustache a shade or two darker; his complexion a pale drab; his eyes a feeble blue; a very long pointed nose; and a rather receding chin, did convey an idea of mental strength; nor did his sloping shoulders, spidery legs, and long neck suggest physical power. He was clothed with extreme neatness and beautiful freshness in grey—stock and all; for as he wore knickerbockers, these were seen. A deep silk neckerchief, drawn through an antique ring, the ends hanging loose, was the only bit of colour about him. He was smiling blandly at something the host was saying, and his expression was kind enough, but Mona scarcely took in these details, so surprised she to see that his friend who followed him was Bertie Everard.

That gentleman's keen eyes detected her instantly, but with usual immobility, he merely raised his eyebrows, smiled faintly, bowed as if he had quite expected to meet his young kinswoman at the *table d'hôte*. Mona was vexed at herself for colouring as she did when she returned his bow, smiling at the same time with irrepressible amusement. The idea of an encounter between Uncle Sandy and Bertie Everard seemed infinitely comic.

"What's that?" asked the former indignantly.

"He is a sort of cousin of mine, or rather of my poor grandmother. I used to stay at his mother's house. She was very kind to me."

"Ay, till you began to earn your own living, those are awfully poor folk. Stop the waiter, will ye! I cannot eat this fish; it has been a deal of the world since it left the water."

The offending fish removed, Uncle Sandy "glowered," as he would have said himself, at the newcomers, till it was replaced by a *salade* of pigeons.

"Just bones and gravy," he observed.

Lord Fitzallan sent away his plate untouched more than once. He spoke little, but he looked about with considerable interest, fixing a glass in his eye, which frequently fell out and gave him a good deal of occupation.

Everard paid steady attention to his dinner. Once when about to drink a glass of champagne, he raised the glass with a nod and smile as if he drank it to Mona's health. This seemed to attract his companion's notice, he immediately refixed his glass, and directed his glances to her with little intermission during the remainder of

repast, evidently asking Everard numerous questions, to which he gave the shortest possible replies.

At length it was all over. Uncle Sandy, leaning heavily on the table and his walking-stick, got on his feet, and taking his niece's arm, moved towards the door, intending to follow his usual habit of retiring to a particular seat in what was termed the Park, where Mona read to him from the newspaper, which generally reached them in the afternoon. Everard also left his seat and came across to intercept their retreat.

"Well, fair cousin, is it gout or rheumatism, or any other fleshly ill, that brings you to this lively health resort? I suspect you are here on false pretences."

He shook hands with her as he spoke.

"No, I am not here on my account. I have come with my uncle, Mr. Craig. This is Mr. Everard, uncle, of whom I have spoken to you."

"Glad to see you, sir," said Uncle Sandy, with such an amiable grin that Mona was surprised. She thought he would have been annoyed at having the young aristocrat forced upon him. Everard made a slight bow, and gave him a cool, scrutinising glance.

"So you have turned nurse, Mona?—a noble calling, eh?"

"It is that, sir," said Uncle Sandy seriously, "and she makes a kind, considerate one, I can assure you!"

"Won't you present me, Bertie!" said Lord Fitzallan, who had paused beside him.

"Oh! certainly. Let me present my cousin Fitzallan, to my cousin Miss— What do you call yourself now, Mona?"

"Miss Craig," she returned quietly, though her cheeks flushed.

Lord Fitzallan bowed twice, once to the lady, once to the crabbed-looking little Scotsman.

"Ah! Miss Craig, don't you think we might contrive a cousinship out of the double relationship," he said, in a soft but weakly voice, and with what he intended for a fascinating simper.

"I am afraid not. The only real relation I have is my uncle."

"What a rude speech, Mona. Do you repudiate me?"

"Oh no! I take you for what you are worth."

"Been long here?" asked Lord Fitzallan.

"About a week," returned Mona.

"And is there positively nothing to do here?" said Everard.

"Yes! a good deal. There is bathing, and water-drinking, and massage, and tennis, archery, lotteries, and a theatre."

"That sounds a good deal, but it's a beggarly entertainment after all."

"Tennis?" put in Lord Fitzallan. "It is amusing for a time. I think I have my racquet with me. Do you play, Miss—Craig?"

"I do."

"Nonsense, Fitz," broke in Everard, "you must not think of

playing. You have come here for the cure, and I have come to see you safe through it. We must bear the boredom as best we can."

"There is a tyrant, ain't he, Miss Craig? Well, are you going out for a stroll? Allow us to join you."

"I find a quiet read after meals is an uncommon help to digestion," said Uncle Sandy, clutching Mona's arm; "and there's a varra pleasant seat out yonder, whar my niece justs reads to me a bittie of an evening; and if we don't mak haste, there's a little black-browed Frenchman that will be before us. You and my lord here can have a look at the *Scotsman* if you like—maybe we don't see it every day; there's room for us a' on the same bench."

Everard lifted his eyebrows.

"Oh! I have some letters to write. How is your friend and partner the music mistress, Mona? It was the funniest idea your running away from my mother to her."

"Run away? Did you really run away? What an enterprising young lady," said Lord Fitzallan, as the quartette strolled along towards the seat indicated.

"Dinna hear till him," cried Uncle Sandy, a good deal disturbed. "My niece is not the sort o' young leddy to do sic an unmannerly imprudence, she is just a lassie wi' a proper sense of independence."

"Proper sense of independence," repeated Everard; "I fancy you will think it improper, when she runs away from *you*?"

"Eh! but she'll no do that! She can have a good home with me if she chooses, as you know, my lord!"

"Who—me?" exclaimed Lord Fitzallan. "My good sir, what do I know about it?"

"Then you ought, considering you have rented my hoose for near on two years! Don't ye mind Craigdarroch?"

"Craigdarroch! by Jove! are you Craig of Craigdarroch? I had not the faintest idea I should meet my landlord in this remote region. And you, Miss Craig, are you not some sort of feudal chief? I am quite ready to swear fealty to you!"

"Naw!" exclaimed Uncle Sandy, with the strongest negation. "It's mine, so lang as I have breath! but it's nae a bad hame?"

"Bad! it is a lovely, picturesque spot, for a month or two in the shooting season; but of course it is impossible in winter, and appallingly dull in spring. Miss Craig could not live there."

"Weel she can live oot o' it if she likes, but not wi' me. I am just wearin' to get back, and I have tauld my agent not to accept ony offer frae you for further occupancy."

"That is too bad, Mr. Craig. I should like to have a third season there! It is a snug little box, and as I do not like large parties, it just suits me."

"Sma'," repeated Mr. Craig indignantly. "There are six large sleeping-rooms, forbye twa ither, and servants' accommodation, a drawing-room, a library, and my museum, and cellars, etc."

"Oh yes, a capital house," said Lord Fitzallan, with an indulgent smile on Mona, as if taking her into his confidence, "only not exactly large. Miss Craig will be charmed with the views, etc. That is, if she does not already know it."

"What a funny notion that Craigdarroch should belong to your uncle, Mona," said Everard.

"And why shouldn't it?" asked Uncle Sandy testily. "Why shouldn't Mona's uncle buy what he likes with the money he worked so hard to make?"

"I am sure I have no objection. Only I wish you would let Fitzallan have the place for another year. I can only be with him for ten days this season, and the shooting about there is first-rate."

"I am afraid you are a self-seeker, young man," said Uncle Sandy solemnly.

"Yes, of course I am. So are you; so are we all."

"I have always tried to do my duty," returned Uncle Sandy, tartled by this attack.

"I daresay. It is much the best plan; it does one no harm if you manage properly, and it pays in the end."

"Yet," said Mona quietly, "I can imagine *your* performance of duty not being specially profitable to your employer."

"What right have you to say that?" cried Everard, a little nettled. "It is appalling to think what your tongue will be when you are an old woman, considering what it is at present."

"Miss—Miss—" began Lord Fitzallan, whose memory was not retentive. "Your charming cousin will never be old."

"Well, I have letters to write, so come along, Fitz. We had better get to bed early. It seems one must get up in the middle of the night here."

"Oh, yes, go to bed by all means. I shall come in presently. It is pleasant and fresh here. I shall stay and have a cigarette, if you will allow me," bowing to Mona.

"Nonsense. You'll catch your death of cold."

"Tell Achille to bring me a scarf then," returned his lordship, drawing out his fuses. "I'll join you presently."

"Good-evening," said Everard, rather abruptly, and he went off towards the *etablissement*.

There was a moment's pause, Uncle Sandy looking after the retreating figure with a somewhat puzzled expression.

"Craig!" suddenly exclaimed Lord Fitzallan. "I have it; same name as your uncle's. Eh?"

"Exactly," said Mona, smiling.

"You'll excuse me. I never could remember about names. And how is it you are Everard's cousin, and—and this gentleman's niece?"

"I do not know how I am Mr. Everard's cousin, but my father was Mr. Craig's brother."

"Ah, yes, of course," with an air of profound comprehension.

"You must be his niece: Glad you gave Bertie a set down; he is an awfully conceited fellow; very good, and clever, and all that, but I must say conceited. You'll not mention I said so?"

"Of course I will not."

"It is the fault of young people to be that self-opinionated that they will no hear reason," said Uncle Sandy.

"Yes, that's a—really the fact," cried Lord Fitzallan, as if struck by a newly-discovered truth.

"But," continued Uncle Sandy, "that is no excuse for your speaking so harsh to him, Mona. It's no becoming in a young lassie to rebuke a man wha nae doot knows far mair than herself."

"I do not admit it, uncle. He may have one kind of knowledge, and I have another, but I do not feel that Bertie is my superior."

"Superior. No, no, no! No one is superior to a charming woman!" cried Lord Fitzallan, with an admiring simper.

"If you please, my lord," said his French valet, approaching with a large soft white scarf in his hand. "Mistare Everard would be glad to speak to your lordship before he closes his letter to my Lord Lynebridge."

"Oh, certainly. Must go. Horrid bore. Hope to see you tomorrow. Good-evening. You must let me have your charming house for another year, Mr. Craig, really now."

He bowed and departed, carefully folding the scarf round his throat, and followed by his valet.

"Eh, but the foolishness of it a'!" exclaimed Uncle Sandy. "My lord and your lordship. A wiselike leader o' men you wad mak, when he daurna refuse to obey the message that bit o' a whipper-snapper sent him by his ain flunky! Not but I think the pair lord-body the best o' the twa. He's kind and civil; but your cousin thinks he can stuff out sun an' moon wi' his thumb and forefinger. You are an honest girlie, Mona. You stuck to your uncle in face o' these fine gentlemen, but don't you be too sharp. Noo, read me a bit o' the parliamentary news before I gang awa' to my bed."

CHAPTER XV.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

MONA did not find life at Contrexéville by any means exhilarating. Her time was never her own ; it required some management even to make a spare half-hour for her weekly letter to Madame Debrisay, whose epistles described her loneliness very eloquently. Uncle Sandy seemed to have taken complete possession of his niece, and was indeed more amiable and affectionate towards her than he had ever been before to any creature.

One reason, probably the strongest for the trust she inspired in him, was her superiority in manner and air, coupled with her complete independence, which yet did not prevent her from treating him with gentle respect. The quiet composure of Mona's exterior hid much fire and sensitiveness,—a depth of nature and power of love, which the "back-bone" inherited with her Scotch blood at once intensified, and preserved from degenerating into weakness.

The old man's peculiarities and contradictions, though often provoking, were, in a certain degree, interesting ; yet Mona pined for the sympathetic companionship of Madame Debrisay,—the sense of rest and comfort in their very homely home. She had ripened rapidly in character and feeling from the time her short spell of brilliancy and pleasure had been so rudely ended. The reality underlying the surface of social life had revealed itself more and more, and she was fast learning how few and simple are the ingredients of true happiness.

At the first moment of recognition, she was displeased to find that Everard and Lord Fitzallan were to be their "companions of the Bath." She feared that the former would irritate her uncle, besides which he was a formidable person to encounter, and she had always to do a little reasoning with herself, before she could face him unflinchingly—a course which always brought its own reward, and in which the first step only, ever cost anything.

It was very amusing to her to see how profoundly gratified that stern republican Uncle Sandy was by being associated as a family connection with the great *grande*s of the season. Sneer as he might at "yon puir feckless bit of a lord" in his absence, he was always placidly content to hobble along with Mona between himself and the elderly young man in public places.

To Everard he was more deferential. That gentleman's good-humoured, unflinching indifference to the feelings of his fellow-creatures filled him with awe. There was no knowing what he might say next, while the fearlessness with which Mona crossed rapids

with him excited his admiration. Yet Everard was always ready to talk with her, and even tried, with the obstinacy for which he was remarkable, to get her away from her uncle to walk with him.

This degree of attention woke Uncle Sandy's suspicions, for, as is not unusual in Scotchmen, he was disposed to attribute all such indications to the master passion of humanity.

"Tell me, noo," he said one exceedingly warm afternoon, as they sat in his room—the coolest spot in the establishment, where Mona had been reading aloud till her throat ached, and he dozed at intervals, "tell me, was it because o' one cousin ye refused the other?"

"How do you mean, Uncle Sandy?"

"Eh, you understan' well enough. Is it because ye love young Everard you refused Kenneth?"

"Love Bertie Everard! Do you think any human being loves him, except, perhaps, his mother?"

"How can I ken? He is a braw, outspoken callant."

"He is brutally indifferent to everyone's feelings. Were I obliged to marry either, I should certainly prefer Kenneth."

"Then what for should you refuse him?"

"Because I do not intend to marry him."

"Do you know that it will go hard wi' me before I ever consent to your marrying any ither mon?"

"Well, I shall not trouble you, uncle."

"Why? Have you sworn against matrimony?"

"No; but I am not strongly inclined for marriage."

"That's wrang. Every woman is the better of a ruler."

"I am conceited enough to be content with my own guidance. Do not think me unkind or obstinate, Uncle Sandy, but I never shall be able to marry Kenneth."

"Then, Mona, I am sair at heart to say it, but I'll no count you as my daughter."

"Oh yes, you will, uncle! You could not do without me!"

"Not weel. Yet I'd try, if you set your face against doing what I want you to do. Has Kenneth written to ye?"

"No; then I have not written to him."

"Well do, like a good lassie."

"Oh yes, uncle, I will write to him."

"Have you been to the theatre?" asked Lord Fitzallan, in the evening, as they sat together in the park.

"No," she replied.

"It's not bad—not bad at all," said Everard. "There's a woman who sings very well, and they all have the national dramatic gift."

"Come with us to-morrow, Miss Craig," cried Lord Fitzallan.

"They give 'Boccaccio,' and it is quite worth going to see."

"I dinna approve play-acting," said Uncle Sandy. "It's just a sinfu' travestie on human nature; and I am told these French plays *are no' fit for a decent-like woman to sit and look at.*"

se of them are rather strong ; but this is really quite correct. ourself, Mr. Craig."

a ? Me ? Na, na. I have never been in a playhouse, and will be."

n very fond of the theatre," said Mona ; " but, as my uncle t approve, I will not go."

inna forbid you. You are free to go ; only I hope you would a young lassie to see what isn't fit for her eyes."

, certainly not ! " cried both gentlemen, in chorus.

en to-morrow evening," resumed Lord Fitzallan ; " I'll go about places. By the way, Miss Craig, let us have a game is to-morrow. I am feeling all the stronger for my treat-

nd I feel I can do wonders. There is that nice little roly- ighish girl—I forget her name—and Bertie."

, no ! No tennis for me. How can you exhaust yourself ch nonsense ? "

s an admirable game, and I am getting quite scientific about t I, Miss Craig ? Come along ; they have some very pretty ecular to the country, I believe, at that rubbish shop just the park."

! I will not let my niece throw away any siller on such "

ill, may she not come and give me the benefit of her taste ? "

! Why should you waste your siller either ? "

m sure you haven't too much to spare ! " cried Everard.

at's my affair," rejoined Lord Fitzallan. " So I shall go by "

the elder Mr. Clapton—Upper Clapton, as Everard called ncle Sandy's friendly adversary—joined them.

ne, have a stroll with me, Mona," said Everard. " I had a rom Evelyn to-day, and I will tell you all about it."

ry well. Uncle, we are going a little way, and will be back

walked along a path leading into the woods in silence for a nutes. At length Mona asked,—

d what does Evelyn say ? "

, nothing particular. She is still in a fool's paradise. They going to Strathairlie, because they want to show off the son r in Cumberland. They are to have a large party, and want

o ; but that is impossible. I must look after Fitzallan ; and ngs me to what I want to say. Don't run away with the no-

r can marry Fitzallan."

rry Fitzallan ! " repeated Mona, amazed. " What an extra- y idea ! "

ll, he is always running after you, and talking bosh about l giving you flowers ; but it's not to be done ! "

y, Bertie, you must be out of your mind."

"Not at all. Don't fly off at a tangent. Of course it is perfectly natural you should try to get a good settlement. It would be a famous match ; but I can't allow it."

Mona paused, leant against a tree, and laughed heartily.

"If I could keep my countenance, I should be angry with you, Bertie ! The determination people seem to have that I shall marry someone or other is absurd."

"But I am determined you shall not marry Fitzallan. Don't you know that, after him, my father is heir to the earldom, and after him your humble servant. Now Fitz was born an idiot, and hasn't improved his brains by hard drinking. His father, Lord Lynebridge, won't give him a penny. Some one has to go about with him, or he would destroy himself in a few months. He proposes for every woman he meets. We had an awful row last April with a girl at a luncheon-bar at Willesden or Ealing or some such place. He is a harmless creature, but his father will not give him a sous, and he does not want him to marry. It would be a splendid match for you, but you see he has been so queer, I believe we could break it, so it will not do to attempt such a hazard."

"Listen, Bertie. What have you ever seen in me to induce you to think of warning me in this insulting manner? Marry Lord Fitzallan ! Why, I would almost rather," she paused and looked at her kinsman from head to foot, "I would almost rather marry you."

"Oh ! you would, would you ? By Jove ! you are the coolest hand I ever met ! I don't think there's a possibility of turning your flank, and I can't understand you. Are you really indifferent to everyone ? Don't you care for wealth or luxury or— You have an uncommon fine pair of eyes, Mona, and there's heaps of devilry sleeping in them."

"No ; you cannot understand *me*, but I understand you, Bertie, and my knowledge of your character does not improve my opinion of human nature ; yet I do not believe you are quite as utterly selfish as you affect to be."

"Affect ! I never affect anything. You put me out of patience with your affectation of disinterestedness, and yet how inconsistent you are. You fly out at me for suspecting you of the very natural, and from your point of view, laudable project of marrying a man of rank, while you hang on like grim death to a low-born, low-bred, rich old buffer, hoping to get his money."

"If my uncle is low-born, so am I. But I shall not waste my breath explaining anything. I do not care if you understand me or not, Bertie. I have not the slightest value for your opinion. I should dislike you, but for your relationship to Lady Mary and the girls, and the sort of amusement your oddities afford. You are a curious creature ! I wonder if you were changed in your babyhood, you are so unlike the rest of your people."

"Well you speak plain enough."

"Yes. I will always speak to you in your own style. What are you—any of you, to me? I want nothing from you. I can supply my own wants, and I have not the smallest ambition to belong to you in any way. I never seek you, and if you ceased to recognise me it would not cause me the smallest annoyance."

"Oh! but I like to talk to you. If I ever could make such an ass of myself as to fall in love, I should fall in love with you."

Mona laughed merrily at this avowal.

"Come let us go back," she said. "You are by no means agreeable. I really regret not having a sympathetic companion this beautiful evening."

"Ay, I daresay you would prefer Lisle now?"

"Yes; a good deal more. He knew how to mask his selfishness, which is all one expects from an everyday acquaintance."

"I think, Mona, I shall cut you in future."

"As you please. I am quite ready to second your efforts. Here is young Mr. Clapton, he will walk back with me. Well, Mr. Clapton, I think we are going to have another cloudless day to-morrow. Is your sister inclined to make a set at tennis? I think my uncle will not want me in the afternoon."

And the hobbledehoy, well pleased to be in attendance on Miss Craig, who was now considered "the glass of fashion, and the mould of form," walked back to the park on one side of Mona, while Everard sulked at the other.

The following day was dry and fine, and the projected tennis match came off very successfully. Mona, and Miss Clapton, her brother, and an Anglo-maniac French count, short, stout and extremely puffy.

Lord Fitzallan appeared in an elegant suit of flannels, and picturesque cap; but he served so badly, and so constantly missed his balls, that he soon declared the heat was too much for him, and he subsided on a bench beside Uncle Sandy, who had so improved in health and spirits that he even confessed to a certain interest in the game, and confided to Lord Fitzallan his conviction that, had he not been such a "frail body," he could have played "fine."

Mona observed that her uncle and Lord Fitzallan gradually got into evidently deep conversation; but she did not take much notice of them, as the game was interesting and the Frenchman played better than usual.

Mr. Craig was rather silent all the evening, and retired to rest even earlier than usual; but he was more gracious than his wont, and there was a tone of veiled superiority in his voice when he spoke to Everard.

"Mona," said her uncle, when after the matutinal water-drinking and douche, etc., etc., next day, she went at noon to administer a biscuit and a glass of wine—"I have something to say to you, my dearie. Sit ye doon."

"Very well, uncle," taking her place beside him on the sofa. "What is it?"

"A verra serious matter, which I hope you'll tak in a serious spirit."

"This sounds serious."

"It's just extremely gratifying, as I think you'll say. That young nobleman has been talking varra seriously to me. He is an honest-like chiel, and he tells me he is verra deep in love wi' you, Mona, and he asket my consent in very proper language. I said I would speak to you, and lay the matter fair before you; but that I begged him not to address you till I had explained a bit, for I am no that sure how you would tak it. But I hope you will hear reason, for I should like to see you a countess, my bonnie bird, before I died, in spite o' that conceited ape Everard, and his schemes."

"And Lord Fitzallan actually proposed for me!" exclaimed Mona, much amused. "Why, uncle, you would not care to see me enrolled among the aristocrats for whom you have so much contempt—and then there is Kenneth! What is to become of him?"

"Aweel, you see, I canna turn things upside doon, whatever my convictions may be; so while these rideec'ulous distinctions continue, it's no so bad to have a share o' them. As to Kenneth," he waved his hand, "you say yourself he does na care for ye. We could find him another wife; and as my lord doesna want ony portion wi' you, I could give a' to Kenneth."

"I am sure you and Lord Fitzallan are very good in arranging for my future; but do you know that Lord Fitzallan is in the habit of proposing for every woman he meets, whether in a ball-room or behind a counter?—that he is a half-witted drunkard, only kept within decent bounds by the watchful care of his family?—that he has not a farthing he can call his own, and his father will not continue his allowance if he marries? Do you know all this?"

"Naw!" exclaimed Uncle Sandy, "and I will not believe it. He told me he was ready to mak handsome settlements; to have the family diamonds reset for you; to have a couple o' rooms always ready for me at Fitzallan towers, for he was sure Lord Lynebridge—that's the earl—his father, would enjoy a crack wi' me, as he is an advanced Liberal. Wha has been filling your mind wi' lees?"

"No one, uncle! Bertie Everard told me what I believe is perfectly true about poor Lord Fitzallan. He is really half-witted, and you must not seem to mind what he says, or you will make yourself and me ridiculous."

"Bertie Everard!" repeated Uncle Sandy, wagging his head knowingly. "I know a' about him—a scheming, double-faced loon. You see, Mona, the crafty deil, he's next heir, and nat'rally he don't want my lord to marry, not he; and so he goes and tells you a bushel of lees. Half-witted indeed! weel he is whole-hearted, and *'s a braw lassie* when he sees her. Don't you listen to them

havers, Mona—be guided by me, and then that ill-natured clan of Everards will just be crazy when you are lifted far above them.”

“I am dreadfully annoyed, uncle, that you should be worried by this kind of false start; and you were so much better—looking so well too. I wish Bertie had never brought poor Lord Fitzallan here. We were quite quiet and happy before they came. Thank goodness, your cure is nearly over! We will have been here three weeks next Wednesday, and let us go away somewhere.”

“Why should I, Mona? and why do you listen to yon double-faced deil! I wish he’d just fall in the river and get drowned out o’ the way, before he turned you against what I want, wi’ his fause havers!” and the old man’s voice grew unsteady with eagerness.

Mona was greatly distressed that her uncle should be so possessed with this impossible scheme, and disappointed to find him so faithless to his own principles.

They talked long and earnestly. At length Mr. Craig began to see that his splendid air-castle was baseless; his good-humour vanished, and with it Mona’s powers of pleasing. He complained of headache and rheumatism, pain in the heart, oppressed breathing, faintness, and many other painful symptoms. He insisted on sending for M. le Directeur and the doctor, and dined in his own room.

Mona did not appear in public either, and Everard confiscated a charming bouquet of roses Lord Fitzallan was despatching to her, and bestowed it in his own name on the delighted Miss Clapton.

In the course of the evening a curious wildly-written and ill-spelt letter reached Mona from his lordship’s pen, in which he professed the most ardent admiration for her beauty, her noble character, her general charms, and declaimed against the cruel plots of heartless relatives against his liberty and happiness.

This Mona tore up, and left unanswered. She took an opportunity, however, of informing Bertie Everard of the occurrence. Finally, the evening before she and Mr Craig left Contrexeville, Lord Fitzallan, in the absence of his valet and his cousin, got hold of a bottle of brandy, and was guilty of some wild antics, which convinced—but by no means consoled—Uncle Sandy.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SERPENT'S TOOTH.

ON the whole, Alexander Craig's retreat from Contrexeville was sudden, and barely in good order. He was not a little crestfallen by the complete collapse of the brilliant hopes which had dawned upon him for a moment. The excellent effect of the treatment and waters, however, had restored his elasticity,* so that his sullenness and irritable depression did not last very long.

By the time they reached Strasbourg and were comfortably settled in a good hotel, he began to talk of making plans; maps and guide-books were brought out, and the old man brightened up when he found Mona was highly pleased at the idea of seeing Switzerland.

She was a very efficient assistant, looking up the railway fares, counting the cost, and calculating the difference between foreign and English money.

"As I canna get my ain hoose till next midsummer, I think we might just see a little of other countries till it's ready, now that I am this side of the water, for I'll no cross it again. It will be summat to talk of and think aboot when I am settled doon for the rest o' my days at Craigdarroch."

"That would be very nice, uncle; and we might spend the winter in Dresden. There I should be quite at home, and I could really be of use to you."

"You're no that useless here," said Uncle Sandy kindly; "and I could maybe get a smattering o' German."

"Oh, no doubt."

And so uncle and niece set out on a pilgrimage, visiting by very slow degrees the most interesting places in Switzerland and on the Rhine.

In this tour we will not attempt to follow; are not these places, their histories and attractions, written in the books of Murray and of Baedeker?

For the winter they rested at Dresden, where Uncle Sandy was both comfortable and happy in the society of a Presbyterian minister of sound views, who taught Mr. Craig chess, a great resource, if sometimes a little irksome to Mona.

It is remarkable how little change of place stamps its impress on time. A variety of residences in no way lengthens or shortens the period passed in them. But in contact with new characters, the association with individuals, who strike the electric chain with which we are darkly bound, these are true events which make the years or months in which they occurred stand out in clear relief from the dead

our lives—and heart or mind history enters a new epoch by the evolution of some germ of action or thought which inanimate, locked in the husk of unconsciousness, till the g current from some kindred yet more advanced soul struck aid, "Let there be light."

the months which followed their departure from Contrere-ssed not unpleasantly, though in a dull routine. Sometimes arful picture, a striking dramatic performance, woke Mona to activity, or a pleasant, thoughtful book gave her subject for n. In general, the English society of such places as Dresden e humdrum order, not stimulating in any sense, unless in-be sprinkled with keen original Americans. Still the quiet se of security assisted her to recover serenity, and face the with steadiness, if no longer with rainbow-tinted hope.

noble Sandy, too, the effect of foreign travel was good. He d too long in the narrow cell of self ever to be thoroughly ated from its contracting trammels, but a certain amount of nment he could not resist. Nothing, however, touched his viction that he was a man of wide information and "soond" nt. Indeed any variation in his former views only suggested . perception must be singularly quick and clear to enable him assimilate new mental food. He spoke somewhat less broadly nd than at the beginning of his Continental progress, and still holding his "siller" with a grip of iron, he began to and what things cost, and what must be paid for. To Mona comparatively generous. Still it required some management on the sum total of his occasional gifts.

Madame Debrisay the loss of her dear companion was a real ment. She was a brave, bright woman, who never wasted r sitting down to mourn over the inevitable, and always up smiling" from the buffets of fortune; but life seemed l worthless when she was left to work for self alone. Affec- s the motive power of her existence. She was always striv- some; but since absinthe and cognac had cut short the f the late lamented Debrisay, no one had ever belonged to pletely, as Mona did for the happy year and a half they had d worked together.

pleasant, well-mannered Franco-Irishwoman was a Bohemian imperfect education, shrewd observation, considerable scep- and great quickness in perceiving and seizing any opportun- ich might offer for pleasure or profit. Yet no high-minded s ever more ready to sacrifice herself for those she loved—to ny dangerous gulf with all she held most precious, that the r to her might pass over safely. Thus her cultivation of andy was a freewill offering to secure Mona's future, her en- ment of his wish to take his niece abroad a disinterested re- ion of the greatest charm her life had known since the s of youth had fled.

Mona's letters were her greatest comfort. They were long and full ; but the reader's keen sympathy detected the undertone of weariness arising from ungenial association, and at times she doubted if Mona was not paying too high a price for uncertain advantages hereafter.

So autumn, winter, and spring passed by, and midsummer was close at hand.

Madame Debrisay began to be anxious for a letter. She had not heard from Mona for more than a fortnight, and then she said that her uncle's plans were all unsettled, when one warm evening, as she was resting after a busy day, the post brought her the expected epistle. It was dated from Paris.

"I have been sight-seeing so constantly," Mona wrote, "and Uncle Sandy has been so undecided, that I could not write to you before, and this will not be worthy the name of a letter ; but I shall be able to tell you all soon, for we start for London on the twenty-second, and my uncle wants you to find lodgings for us as near you as possible. I need not tell you they must be the most moderate you can find. We shall arrive at Charing Cross, where Kenneth Macalister is to meet us ; and pray have dinner or supper ready for the whole party, your dear self included, at seven or eight o'clock. How we shall talk ! How delightful it will be to see you again."

Need it be said with what eager joy Madame Debrisay set about executing the welcome commission. How she reduced the rent first demanded, extinguished the gas charge, put out the kitchen fire, and pooh-poohed boot cleaning and "cruets," insisting that all should be lumped together for a fixed sum, and added to the weekly rent.

"There's nothing vexes a stingy man like an array of extras, when he has made up his mind to one thing," she thought. "Your money shall be paid regularly, but never put an extra on your bill—not even an etcetera. Write 'one week's rent and attendance inclusive,' with the rent we have agreed to opposite. Not another word, or the gentleman, who is as rich as a Jew, will walk out of the house. He is very careful of his money, but never keeps anyone waiting for it."

Thus to the listening landlady, who was glad enough to secure a tenant, as the height of the season was past, and promised and vowed any amount of care and attention.

It was a fine, glowing evening when Madame Debrisay, in her prettiest cap, awaited the arrival of the travellers, having assisted to lay the table and make the place look neat and pretty. Of course those watched for were late, or seemed to be ; but at last a cab, laden with luggage, drew up to the gate, and the next moment Mona was in her friend's arms.

"Mee darlin' child ! I have been that lonely without you ! And you are looking right well, but terribly sunburnt."

A hearty kiss, and then she went to greet Mr. Craig, who de-

ended from the cab with more alertness than she had ever seen him show before.

"Delighted to see you looking quite a new man, my dear Mr. Craig!" she cried, a genuine look of pleasure dancing in her bright, dark eyes, as she shook hands with him heartily. "Welcome back, after all these long months!"

"Thank ye! thank ye!" he returned, pleased with the warmth of her greeting. "I'm not sorry to be back again. I hope you are well?"

"Yes, quite well! I am an evergreen. Mr. Macalister has been good enough to come to cheer me up occasionally. Very kind of him to trouble about an old woman. Glad to see you. Go inside. Mr. Craig, your nephew and I will settle with the cabman."

"Na, na! I'll just pay himself myself."

This done, Madame Debrisay and Mona had a few precious moments to themselves, and then the party sat down to high tea, with the sense of enjoyment arising from the mixture of familiarity and complete change.

"How delicious the tea is!" cried Mona. "That is one thing you rarely get abroad."

"Eh! but it is good to get a bit of dry toast again," said Uncle Sandy. "And Kenneth, my mon, I am right glad to see you!"

"Thank you, sir. I'm sure I have missed you and—and Miss Mona here, sorely. It was a pleasure to have a bit talk with Madame while you were away."

"But, uncle! Kenneth is not looking at all well. He is pale and thin. Have you been ill, Kenneth?"

"Oh, nothing to speak on! Just a cold, and a heaviness in my limbs."

"Eh, mon!" said Uncle Sandy, with a knowing smile, "it's grand to have a braw young lassie speerin' after your health."

"She was always fery good to me," said Kenneth uneasily.

Then as appetite was allayed, talk flowed full and free.

"I think, uncle," said Mona, after a good deal of description of the people and places they had seen, "I think you ought to take Kenneth with you to Craigdarroch. It would do him a world of good. And he knows all about land and animals. He would be a better companion than I could be."

"Ah, but I canna want you! If I had my own way, I'd have you baith always by me."

"Well, I am sure that is not impossible," said Mona thoughtlessly. She had forgotten her uncle's schemes; it was so long since she had heard anything about them.

"Ahem! I am glad to hear it," he returned dryly.

Words which stirred Mona's memory. She laughed and blushed, glancing at Kenneth with friendly comprehension.

His face grew longer, and his eyes had a startled expression, which amused Mona.

But Uncle Sandy began to talk of going to bed, and asked his nephew to unstrap his portmanteau for him ; and as his room adjoined the dining-room which Madame Debrisay had secured for their accommodation, they could hear the murmur of voices as Kenneth assisted his uncle to unpack.

"Come, *mon ange* !" cried Madame Debrisay ; "I will go and have a few words in peace with you while you get out your clothes. I'm dying to hear all about everything !"

"And I to tell you. Ah, Deb ! I wish I could live and work with you ! But, really, Uncle Sandy has been most kind to me, and I am fonder of him than I ever thought I should be. But sometimes his selfishness—his narrowness—repels me ; still I feel bound to him !"

Safe in Mona's little room upstairs, the friends enjoyed the delights of full, free interchange of confidence.

Of all Mona had to relate, the episode of Everard's appearance at Contrexéville interested Madame Debrisay most.

"To think of such an out-and-out Radical as Mr. Craig wishing you to marry a nobleman !" cried madame, shrugging her shoulders, when Mona had finished her story. "Ah, *ciel* ! what inconsistent creatures men are ! I have heard of this Fitzallen, my dear ; and he is as mad as a hatter !"

"He must be," said Mona thoughtfully.

There was a few moments' pause, then Madame Debrisay said, in a gently remonstrating voice,—

"Come now, my own darling ; will you never tell me what is at the bottom of it all ?"

"All what, Deb ?"

"Your refusing poor Mr. Waring, and the state you were in when you had consented to marry him before your grandmother's death ! Why I never saw such a face as you had ! There was some man at the bottom of it."

"I can only assure you, Deb, I was perfectly heart-whole when I accepted Mr. Waring ; and I wish you would not remind me of that dreadful time—pray put it out of your mind. I hope we may soon read the announcement of Mr. Waring's marriage, and that he may live happy ever after."

"Well, I can *not* understand it," murmured Madame Debrisay, in a wondering tone ; "but I do understand that you don't choose to tell."

"Never mind, dear ; you must tell me all your news now."

Uncle Sandy did not seem in a hurry to go north. He lingered in London, and Kenneth was under orders to come up every evening. Mona took advantage of his presence to steal away occasionally to enjoy some music and talk with Madame Debrisay. These absences did not please her uncle. He grew cross and fidgety, and

Mona began to fear that he had left his reasonableness on the other side of the Channel.

It was quite ten days after their return before Kenneth found an opportunity of speaking with her alone. The only means of securing a *tête-à-tête* was to go out walking.

An unusually fine evening offered an excuse, and Mona gladly accepted Kenneth's invitation—Madame Debrisay offering to play chess with Uncle Sandy.

"Now that we have got clear of houses and people, Kenneth," began Mona, as soon as they succeeded in finding a secluded seat in Kensington Gardens. "tell me what is troubling you, for I see that you are troubled."

"Troubled? Yes, I should think so. Indeed, I am not one bit more forward than when we parted, and I doubt if I shall get away this summer. Then Mr. Black is in worse health than ever: we fear he will have to leave the school; and here is my uncle hurrying me to marry you—or rather to ask you again."

"Well, ask me again, Kenneth," said Mona sweetly, "and I'll give you the same answer."

"Eh, it will be hard to put him off now," groaned Kenneth; "he is bent upon it whatever."

"Still, you cannot marry me against my will?"

"No; but Uncle Sandy says you refused a grand nobleman for my sake, Mona?"

"No; for my own sake. He was a poor, half-witted creature. Kenneth we must put a stop to this! You must tell Uncle Sandy that you have asked me again, and that I have refused you; tell him you do not care to have anything to do with a girl who is so averse to accept you. If my uncle calls me to account, I will settle the matter very quickly; I am quite able to earn my bread, and I only stay with him from a feeling of duty and compassion. Let him break with me if he chooses. He might take you to manage the farm, and then he would not be lonely. I do not want to interfere with your heirship, Kenneth."

"Eh, but I am sure of that, cousin Mona! Nor would I rob you. Anyhow, I'll speak as you advise. I am sorry to vex the old man, and mean no offence to you. If I had not known Mary I might have grown fond of you. There is no knowing."

"No, Kenneth—no knowing to what you might have been reduced," she returned, laughing good-humouredly at the simple self-conceit which blinded him to his total unfitness to be her husband.

Then the young Highlander indulged in a long, discursive monologue respecting his trials and troubles—his unfitness for his present occupation—his longing for a free air out-door life.

It was late when they reached home, and found that Uncle Sandy had retired to bed with a bad headache, and, according to Madame

Debrisay, a bad fit of sulks, as he had lost the game—and to be beaten, especially by a woman, was intolerable.

"Your uncle desired me to say that he wished to see you late or early to-morrow evening, Mr. Kenneth," she concluded, "so try and come as early as you can."

"Very well," said Kenneth, looking as though he did not like it.

"Do you think to-morrow will be the crucial test, Kenneth?" asked Mona, answering the look.

"I feel as if it would be."

"Then do not fear. You will get through, and it is better to have it out."

"Yes; but you have not so much at stake as I have, cousin Mona."

"That is true!—but 'faint heart never won fair lady.'"

"And remember you have two bright women to help you, Mr. Kenneth," added Madame Debrisay.

"You are fery good, fery," he said warmly, "And now I must bid you farewell. I am late as it is, and I want to write a long letter before I sleep."

"May I guess who to, Kenneth?"

"Ah, you know, I daresay."

"That poor fellow is over-weighted with heart for the race of life," said Madame Debrisay reflectively, when they were alone. "It is about the worst sort of weight a man can carry! It is sad to see how good fellows fail by hundreds, while your hard, wiry, indifferent fox-terrier-like men scramble over friends and enemies alike to success, no matter how many they tread down in the process. That boy is made for a pastoral life, with a dash of the hunter's—I am sorry for him in Uncle Sandy's clutches."

"Yet Uncle Sandy tries to be just."

"Maybe so; but he never thinks of other people's wants and wishes, only of what he wants himself—and you see one man's receipt for perfect bliss may be needles and pins to his neighbour."

"I feel as if we should have a tug of war to-morrow. I earnestly hope my uncle will not break with Kenneth. I am really much more independent, with *you* to back me, dear Deb."

"Well, well, I begin to think it might be a long, hard service for an inadequate return. But what I fear is that between two stools you may fall to the ground. If you are to work for yourself, you have as good as lost two seasons, for the holidays are close at hand. I wish the old gentleman would declare his intentions!"

All the next day Uncle Sandy was silent, touchy, dissatisfied. He felt out of sorts, and was quite sure the veal he had eaten the previous day had not been sufficiently cooked. How was it he could eat veal abroad, and not at home? etc., etc.

These symptoms boded ill for the evening's interview.

When tea time approached, Mona observed,—

"If you want to speak particularly to Kenneth Macalister this evening, shall I go out of the way to Madame Debrisay?"

"No," said Uncle Sandy emphatically. "I'll likely want you, and had best be at hand in your own room."

"Very well," returned Mona.

Kenneth presented himself in tolerably good time—yet not before Sandy had begun to fidget and fret because he had not come.

The private conference between uncle and nephew had not lasted before a message was despatched to Mona, who was trying to finish her own room.

"Mr. Craig says would you please to come down, miss."

Mona descended. Uncle Sandy was grasping the arms of his chair and speaking in an angry tone. Kenneth was standing on the hearthrug, with flashing eyes and a heightened colour.

"Such wilful contumaciousness," were the words which hissed from Uncle Sandy's lips as his niece entered the room.

"Come here, Mona! Is it true what Kenneth's been telling me you have again refused to be his wife?"

"Yes!"

"And has he sought you with the respect and the—the perseverance should show?"

"No, uncle. I have no fault whatever to find with him."

"Then why are you so obstinate? Why will you reject what's so plain good and happiness, and refuse to agree to what I have decided for you?"

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, uncle, but in such a matter I cannot resist my own instincts."

"Instincts indeed! You are no cat or a dog! Why did ye choose a respectable young man—your uncle's heir, mind you—in a matter that gars him say he'll never ask you mair!"

"I'm very sorry if I offended Kenneth, for I really like him, and thought it only right to explain that I could give him no more."

"And he did nae offend you?"

"No, uncle! Kenneth never would offend a lady."

"I'm glad you say it, for I have been angered against him. He's a wise lassie, and mak up your mind to tak him if he comes to you again, then ye can baith come awa' wi' me to Craigdarroch. I doubt but the man I let the land to is just making a good mill of it; in another year, I'll get it into my ain hands, and want Kenneth to be my factor, and we twa men folk would be without a lassie to look after us—so you speak up Kenneth, and ask her before my face."

"I'll Kenneth, do not!" cried Mona, colouring with pain at the prospect of disappointing her uncle, and also with irritation at the dense prejudice which prevented him from perceiving the unsuitability of such

a marriage. "I should only repeat what I have said before. Though I am heartily sorry to refuse any request of yours, uncle is impossible I can let anyone choose a husband for me."

"And I must declare I canna wish to marry a young leddy who has refused me three times! It would be very unwise to tak a reluctant wife. May be some other young leddy—"

Kenneth got so far, when Mr. Craig interrupted him bitterly—

"Ay, ay, my lad! there's as good fish in the sea as ever was caught; an' I see it's no' your fault. I don't know what's the matter wi' you, Mona? If you have another lad in your e'e, it'll be some ne'er-do-weel, I am afeard. If it's yon sneering deevil Evers, he wad na' walk across the street for you. You'll be sorry for your contradictiousness one day."

"My dear uncle," laughing, "I never supposed Bertie Evers cared for mortal but himself. I assure you I have no lad of that description in my mind's eye."

"Aweel!" cried Uncle Sandy, greatly enraged, "it is varra ungrateful and unbecoming to mak a laughing-stock of your uncle who has spent a kist o' siller on you! To think that you'll refuse a fine good young man, and never give a thought to your puir uncle's comfort, all for mere selfishness, and an ill-placed fancy. A woman's life is no good to her, if she has na' a husband to rule her."

"In that I cannot agree with you! I am sincerely sorry to disappoint you; but if you think of it, you will see how impossible it is for anyone to choose a husband or wife for another. I am by means afraid of managing my own life unassisted by a husband."

"Eh, you think you might rule the kingdom, I daursay! but I no have onybody wi' me that will not hear reason, or respect my wishes. Kenneth has done his best to obey me, so he shall come with me to Craigdarroch! and you can stay with that fantastical Frenchwoman, who, I suppose, encourages ye in—"

"That must not be, uncle," said Kenneth firmly. "I will stand in my cousin's way."

He had been fidgeting uneasily, eager to put in a word.

"You'll not stan' in your cousin's way! you'll not! What's the matter to you? Are you baith so daft-like as to think you can divide my property and—and my siller betwixt ye, under my very een, before the breath is oot o' my body? Eh! but I'll give neither of ye a bawbee! I'll just build a retreat for puir meenisters, and endow them. Why should I fash myself wi' a couple of contermacious young fules?"

"And you may please yourself for me, uncle!" cried Kenneth. "anyway, it will no weigh on my conscience that I didn't try to do as you desired."

"Aweel, I know that, an' I shall not forget it, though I will not have you dictating and presuming. You just give notice to your employers, and come awa wi' me to Craigdarroch. And you, Mo-

am done wi' you ; you may go to your chum. I renounce you ; you are just heartless, like your auld grandmither's fine aristocratic friends, and look down on folks that are better than yourself."

"You ought not to be so angry with me, uncle?" said Mona gently. "I am only exercising a right of choice that belongs to the humblest and poorest. I am really grieved to think we must part. You have been very good to me, and I hope I have been some comfort to you ; but there must be no misunderstanding : I ever will accept a husband, save of my own free choice !"

"And a mull you'll mak of it ! Kenneth, my mon, I'll tak a lass o' water wi' a drap of whiskey—just ring the bell. I'll trouble you nae mair, Miss Craig ; you can drop my name again, for a' I are, and gang yer ways. You, Kenneth, just give warning to your landlady : I'll give you Mona's room."

"But, uncle, I cannot—" began Kenneth.

"Do not contradict him," whispered Mona, passing close by, as he approached her uncle. "Good-bye then," she said kindly, "I will never offer to return, but if you want me, and ask me, I will come to you !"

She tried to take his hand, but he pushed hers away, and turned his face from her like a naughty child.

Mona looked at him kindly, and a little sadly, and then left the room, forbidding Kenneth, by a gesture, to follow her.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT VARIANCE.

A CHANGE had indeed come o'er the spirit of her dream. Mona scarcely expected such energetic action on her uncle's part. That he would be angry she expected, but she did not think he would take such strong measures. However, there was nothing for it but submission to the decree of banishment pronounced against her, she therefore packed up her belongings, told the landlady she was going away for a short time, and retreated to Madame Debrisay.

That lady was not at home. She had gone to pass the evening with a German violinist and his wife, with whom she was on rather intimate terms, so Mona sat down to wait for her.

She had often felt weary of poor Uncle Sandy's whims and exactions, but she had grown to care more for him than she knew. He had become so dependent on her, that the maternal instincts of a womanly heart had gone out to the creature she protected. Moreover, she believed him to be a greater sufferer than he really was. That he should attempt to dictate to her in such a purely personal matter, was hurtful enough, but that he should rudely turn her out,

wounded her deeply. How miserable the old man would be, too, all alone, doing battle with the landlady, and fretting over a hundred-and-one trifling annoyances from which he had hitherto been shielded. Was it possible that the moisture on her cheek was a tear? She was afraid that, on the whole, she was no favourite of fortune. It seemed her fate to be constantly uprooted. How little rest she had known since she left the tranquil seclusion of her Dresden school—only a few months of feverish, fitful joy, and then clouds and darkness.

Madame Debrisay did not come in till ten o'clock.

"And is it here you are, all alone by yourself in the dark?" she cried, coming in quickly through the soft gloom of a summer's night. "This is too bad! To think of me talking politics to that castle-building German, when I might have been here with you, dear. How is it you got away from our dear Old Man of the Sea?"

"Easily enough, dear Deb! Uncle Sandy has turned me out because I have decidedly refused to marry Kenneth Macalister."

"Turned you out!" repeated Madame Debrisay, as she struck a match and lit the gas. "Has he gone off his head?"

"I do not think so; but I have ventured to believe *you* will take me in, and in that belief I have told Mrs. Puddiford that my room was wanted, so I came over here?"

"Turned you out!" repeated Madame Debrisay, sitting down suddenly and taking off her bonnet, which she dropped on the floor; "and all for not marrying that long-legged Highlander, who is not fit to dust your shoes."

"No, no, Deb; he is a very good fellow?"

"Oh, good enough, but not for such as you. So I suppose it is all over!"

"What is all over?" asked Mona.

"My hopes that your uncle would provide for you. Now you are no better off than you were before. Indeed you are worse off, for you have to make up for all the time you spent wandering about with that old bear."

"The usual fate of legacy-hunters," returned Mona, smiling.

"You are no legacy-hunter, Mona. I declare that cantankerous uncle of yours can have no more heart than a flint."

"I do not believe he is quite heartless," said Mona thoughtfully;

"I believe he is fond of me, and will soon recall me."

"When I hope you will have more spirit than to respond!" cried madame indignantly; "he deserves to be left to hirelings for the rest of his days."

"That would be a cruel punishment for an outbreak of temper: it was nothing more. Come, dearest Deb, I am tired and depressed; I will go to bed. Do you know that it is very delightful the idea of breakfasting *tete-a-tete* with you to-morrow?"

"Is it, my darling? Ah, it warms my heart to hear you say so!"

If you belonged to me now ; if you were my own, own child, oh, it would give me the strength of a dozen women to work for you and fight for you ; not but I'd do it all the same, only I'd have a right to you then."

"Until I married some selfish tyrant of a man, who would show his love by separating me from you," returned Mona, taking her hand in both hers with an affectionate smile.

"Ah, just so," sighed Madame Debrisay ; "there are eddies of misfortune at every bend in the stream of life ; some slip past them and more slip in. I don't know how it is, Mona, you always remind me of my precious baby girl that was taken from me when she was two years old. She had hair just like yours. How much the heart can live through ! I died one death when I found out the real man I had married, but I came to life again with the life I gave. Then I went down to the grave once more with my sweet, sweet baby, and dragged on a half-conscious existence till poor Debrisay went : that took a load off me. I began to be a living woman again. The music always was a comfort to me ; and here I am, battling for bread, and taking what pleasure I can get ! Is it not amazing the vitality of some natures ? Now I have you to look after, dear, it doubles my life. Ah, what would we be without love ? It is the true religion, and the real damning sin is selfishness ! Good-night, dear."

The next day was one of Madame Debrisay's busiest, and it was exceedingly wet. Mona sat in-doors very contentedly, busy with book or needle, and Uncle Sandy made no sign.

The following evening, Kenneth made his appearance, with an exceedingly perturbed aspect.

The partners were sitting at table enjoying a late tea when he came in.

"Well, Mr. Macalister, what news ?" cried Madame Debrisay, putting down the teapot to shake hands with him.

"Good-evening, Kenneth. You do not look too happy," said Mona.

"Happy," he repeated ; "I am just miserable. I am thinking Uncle Sandy's gone clean daft. He was up in the City, at our place, and saw Mr. Sinclair—that is the principal partner. Came in all the rain in a cab from Moorgate Street. He told Mr. Sinclair that he was going to adopt me, and requested I might be allowed to leave, as he could not go to his place in the Highlands without me. So I was called up, and old Sinclair made me a speech about my good fortune, and my excellent conduct while in the service of the house (I don't believe he knew my name rightly half-an-hour before) ; and the two old fellows complimented each other. I fancy Mr. Sinclair thinks I am to come in for ten thousand a year at least. This morning all the clerks were congratulating me, and I felt like a thief."

"Why should you, Kenneth? I assure you I should have been more miserable than you *look*, if I thought my uncle had quarrelled with you about me. I have perfect confidence in your loyalty."

"And you may have that, cousin Mona; but it's many a long while before I can be of any use to you."

"Let me give you a cup of tea, Mr. Kenneth," said madame kindly. "It is my opinion," she continued, as she poured it out, "that neither one or other of you will ever see a sou of your uncle's money. He will get all he can out of you, and then leave all he has to some church or institution, or something wicked of that kind."

"No, I do not think that," returned Mona thoughtfully. "I believe he is quite earnest in his intention now, but he might change his mind."

"After all," cried Madame Debrisay, "I don't believe he will be much to leave behind him. He talks big; but for all the cry, I expect there is not much wool."

"There is no telling," said Kenneth. "But I think he is rather poor. My poor mother thought he was *very* rich."

"We shall never know till poor Uncle Sandy has no further need of our services," said Mona, smiling. "So there is no use counting."

"That is true. Eh, but he is dreadfully angered against Mr. Kenneth," returned Madame Debrisay, addressing Kenneth. "When I told him I would come over and see her, he broke out against her, and bade me to cross your threshold. I could not stand that. I told him that I was willing to obey him in many ways, but that neither of us had any right to quarrel with her. So after some words—a good many words—he told me to do as I liked, but I never to name your name to him. He is awful miserable—just flinging the flesh off his bones. We are to start for Craigdarroch Monday."

"On Monday!" exclaimed madame. "And will they let me away from the office so soon?"

"I don't think I am so valuable that they want to keep me," said Kenneth, with a grin. "Anyhow, we are off on Monday; I can't say I like having the care of Uncle Sandy all that way. We are to stay a couple of days in Glasgow, that he may see his man business, and then go on to Kirkcubright—that's the nearest station to Craigdarroch. It's on a loch, I believe, and it's a fine place."

"You must write and let us know how you get on, Kenneth."

"I will drop you a line, cousin. The worst is, I see no chance of getting away north to Glencorrie. My uncle will not let me from him."

"That will be trying. You would want my help there, Kenneth."

"Eh, I should indeed. Uncle Sandy treats me *very* differently from what he does you. I cannot manage for him in the house, but I am not afraid of the fields and the woods. I'll manage the

fine. I was always with the laird's factor till my poor mother died, and then Uncle Sandy would have me in an office to learn business."

Some more talk and friendly conjecture made time pass quickly till Kenneth rose to bid them good-night.

Mona could hardly believe that Uncle Sandy would leave town without seeing her, and she kept a good deal in-doors until the Monday fixed for his departure; but the old man made no advance. Indeed, one afternoon Madame Debrisay met him walking with the aid of his stick, when he passed her without the slightest sign of recognition. She came home in high wrath, and denounced his folly and obstinacy, and many other bad qualities, with much eloquence. Mona said nothing.

She was hurt by her uncle's conduct, but not inconsolable. She only regretted seriously the period of the year at which the break had occurred, as the difficulty of finding employment forced her to impinge on her small capital.

Madame Debrisay insisted on her being a guest for at least a month, to which the fear of offending her kind hostess compelled Mona to agree. Otherwise, the rest and congenial companionship were very delightful.

Uncle Sandy had been gone about a week, and the last days of July were fast slipping away, when one warm sultry afternoon, as Mona was leaving Marshall & Snelgrove's, where she had been shopping for madame, whose soul expanded at sale time, a smart footman overtook her, accosting her with the words, "If you please'm Lady Finistoun would be glad to speak to you."

"Lady Finistoun?" repeated Mona, looking round. "Where is she?"

"Her ladyship is in the carriage, close by."

Following the man, Mona was soon shaking hands with her former ally.

"I was so afraid I should miss you, dear," cried the young peeress, shaking hands warmly with her. "I was afraid you had vanished from me altogether. Bertie told me about meeting you abroad with a wonderful old millionaire of an uncle. Come, let me drive you wherever you are going, or, better still, let me take you to see baby. Such a dear darling babe. You will be enchanted with him. Do come in. Open the door, William."

"Oh, yes! I should be so delighted to see your baby, dear Evelyn!" said Mona.

The next minute she was seated beside Lady Finistoun, and driving towards that lady's house.

"Why did you not let me know you were in town?"

"I have not been long here," returned Mona, "and I have been busy. Nor did I think of looking you up. You see it is no use attempting to be on the old footing. We must drift apart."

"Oh, nonsense! You look as well—indeed better than ever."

You will never lose your style, Mona, and I daresay you will marry very well, especially with this rich uncle behind you."

"My uncle has an heir."

"No! Has he? How very disgraceful! Never mind, dear, you are evidently a favourite of fortune. Where are you staying now?"

"With Madame Debrisay."

"And what have you done with the uncle?"

"He has quarrelled with me and left me."

"Oh, you foolish girl! How did you offend him?"

"It is too long a story to tell you now. Tell me about yourself."

Nothing loth, Lady Finistoun poured forth the annals of a gold life flooded with the sunshine of prosperity—with busy pleasure and carelessness, though kindly, happiness.

They were, she said, on the point of starting for a month's cruise in northern latitudes, with a gay party, in the Duke of Hallamshire yacht, during which time the son and heir, now nine months old, was to stay with Lady Mary at the Chase.

"By-the-bye, Geraldine is engaged," she went on—"engaged a charming man, only he has no money, so they are obliged to wait till he gets an appointment. My father is rather cross about it, but I daresay it will all come right."

Here they reached Hyde Park Gardens, and Lady Finistoun sent a peremptory message to nurse. She soon appeared with the Honourable Hector Aubrey Douglas Montgomerie in her arms—a very active young gentleman, who did his best to precipitate himself head-foremost on the floor—jumping, crowing, clutching at the nurse's cap, and slobbering after the fashion of babies from James' to St. Giles'. He held out his plump, mottled arms to the delighted mother, who proudly took him, and then, as the high mark of affection and confidence, gave him to Mona. She received him with no small apprehension, though pronouncing him, with genuine admiration, to be a splendid fellow, and "so like Lord Finistoun."

"Do you see the likeness too? Yes, I think he is. But do you know, Mona, he has the Newburgh grey eyes? They are like yours, Mona! Don't you think baby's eyes are very like Miss Jocelyn's—I mean Miss Craig's? (Your name always puzzles me, Mona)."

"Perhaps so, my lady. They are very fine eyes, any way."

A little more showing off, and nurse judged that her lady had had as much of baby's society as was good for them all. She suggested that the young gentleman's own apartment was cooler and fresher for him than the drawing-room. After a little more kissing and cuddling he was taken away, and Lady Finistoun and her kind woman sat down to tea.

"I am so glad you are pleased with the boy! I could see from your eyes you were ready to love him. There are lots of pe-

ready to exclaim, 'He is a fine child !' but few look at him as you did, dear Mona !' cried the young mother. "Take off your hat, and we shall have a nice chat over our tea. I am not at home to anyone, Tomkins"—to the butler. "I want you to come and stay with me at Strathairlie. As soon as our cruise is over we are going for a week to the Chase, and will be in the Highlands the second week of September. Will you come, Mona?"

"I do not think I can. I shall want to be in town by the first of October, and—"

"Oh, but you really must come ! And then, didn't Bertie tell me that the millionaire uncle has a place quite near. Then you can make friends with him. We will ask him to dinner. Those sort of people are always so pleased when they are asked to dinner."

"I do not think Uncle Sandy would dine with anyone."

"I don't believe that ! We are going to have rather a pleasant party. I am sorry my father and mother cannot come. They talk of going to Vienna till after Christmas. I should like you to be good friends again."

"Have they not forgiven me yet ?" asked Mona with a smile.

"Well—a—no, I am afraid not. But dear mother is not an irreconcilable. When you meet you will be all right. Lord and Lady Waterton are coming, and Colonel Markham, the great shot ; then, later, Sir Arthur Fitzgerald and Mr. Mercer, the man who has such a lovely baritone ; Mrs. Barrington and the two girls, a brother of Finistoun's, and oh, I cannot remember all ! We cannot put up a great many, but I have never seen the place yet. I believe the scenery about it is lovely. If you do not come to me or go to your uncle, where can you go this autumn ?"

"I shall not go anywhere. I shall stay very thankfully with my good friend Madame Debrisay, who never changes towards me."

"Ah, yes, she is a dear old thing ! But fancy staying in London all the year. You will make yourself ill, Mona."

"Just think, Evelyn, of the hundreds of people who never quit it, and live on."

"Then they are quite different."

"I cannot see," began Mona, when Lady Finistoun interrupting her, exclaimed—"Oh, Mona ! do you remember Captain Lisle ?"

"I do."

"He has come into a large property and a baronetcy."

"Oh, indeed ! How did that happen ?"

"I think he always expected it. Old Sir Howard Lisle was a relation of his father's, and as they were an non-marrying set of men, our acquaintance, though not a near cousin, was the next heir."

So, after all, he was not a poor man. He had wealth and position almost in his grasp when he shrank from sharing his life with her, thought Mona, while Lady Finistoun rattled on. "But I suppose there are many like him," was her conclusion.

"I rather think my mother would have liked him for Geraldine, but I am not so sure he would have made a good husband," Lady Finistoun was saying when Mona listened again. "These fascinating, all-accomplished men seldom do. They tell queer stories about him. The Countess of Northallerton went out of her mind about him, so it is said, and only the earl died so suddenly, there would have been a fearful row."

"He was very agreeable," said Mona quietly.

"Yes. He has been very popular in India, but he is coming home how on 'urgent private affairs,' I suppose, and will probably leave the army. You are not going yet, Mona?"

"I must. Madame Debrisay will be looking for me."

"Oh! she will not mind, when she knows I kept you; and I do not know when I shall see you again, for I have more engagements than I can manage every day before we go down to Cowes."

"Still, dear, I must go. I am so glad I saw the baby. Madame Debrisay will be charmed to hear all about him."

"Then leave me your address. I am determined to make you come to me at Strathairlie. Perhaps I shall have a peep at you when I pass through town in September."

"Oh, yes. I will write in your address-book."

Lady Finistoun embraced her affectionately, and straightway forgot all about her till they met again.

Mona walked leisurely home through Kensington Gardens in a very thoughtful mood. She was truly delighted to see Evelyn so bright—so happy. She had keenly noticed the beauty and richness of her surroundings—every minutiae of her dress, of the china and silver in which their tea was served, the noiseless perfection of the service, all indicated the luxurious ease of her life, and of the life which she represented. Yet on sounding her own heart, Mona was glad to find that it had roused no regretful longing, no repining or dissatisfaction with her own lot. The whole routine of splendid ease would not have been so sweet to Mona as the simple evening meal which awaited her, seasoned as it was by true affection and complete sympathy.

Of course Evelyn had these also. But the general effect of her visit was to increase her thankfulness that she had resolutely refused to marry Mr. Waring. She felt, as her self-knowledge increased, that she dared not risk her future with anyone she did not deeply and truly love. Hers was a heart that could not long remain empty, swept and garnished.

The encounter with Lady Finistoun afforded much matter for talk to Madame Debrisay. She did not press Mona to accept her invitation.

"I am not sure it would do you any good, dear. It is better to keep with those of your own trade. It went to my heart to see you

ive your beautiful home, and the society you were used to ; but it d to be done, and there is no use in looking back. Life has many les, and there's none without its own spark of light."

So the friends enjoyed the quiet holiday time together. Prudence rbade their leaving town. But Mona, fresh from her wanderings, is glad to rest ; and Madame Debrisay was quite content while she d Mona.

Kenneth wrote occasionally. Uncle Sandy was greatly annoyed the mismanagement of all things appertaining to the farm during s absence. He had dismissed the man he had left in charge, and s determined, with Kenneth's help, to direct everything himself ; it he was very unwell and fractious. He never mentioned Mona's me, but Kenneth was of opinion that he thought of her a good al. Meantime there was no chance of his getting away, and he gan to fear that it would be many a month before he could see his ighland Mary.

The days and weeks flew by rapidly, and Madame Debrisay was ginning to think of work again, when one morning in the first ek of September, the post brought Mona a letter addressed in eceedingly shaky, spider-like caligraphy. It bore the post-mark "Kirktown" ; and having looked at it earnestly for a moment, e exclaimed—

"Why, here is a letter from Uncle Sandy !"

"You don't say so ! Read it to me, if you will."

"I'll try. What an awful hand."

"MY DEAR NIECE—As you have had time to think over your und and ungrateful conduct to your natural protector and nearest kin, I make no doubt you are sorry and ashamed of yourself. ut, as youth is always wilful and self-opinionated, I dare say false ame holds you back from saying you are sorry. Therefore, for e sake of your poor father, and indeed for your own, I will believe at you say them in your heart, and are willing to atone to me, by ying to be a comfort to my poor troubled old age, which you have en, all the time we have journeyed together.

"Kenneth is a good lad, and decently sensible out of doors, but ithin it is awful desolate without a woman to order things. I erefore propose that, if you are penitent, as I hope you are, you me and stay with me as my daughter, to look after me, and rule y house, and I promise that you shall not be asked to wed with yone you do not like, but that if you *do* wed, and leave me, you ill find some wise-like woman to bide with me, and care for me, in ur place.

"Now, you must write at once to me, yes or no, and then come soon as you can start. Kenneth shall meet you in Glasgow. As u are young and strong, you might take the night train and come here when you have taken a bite of breakfast in Glasgow. Feel- g sure you will come to your old uncle, I enclose you a post-office

order for three pounds five shillings and sixpence, to pay your fare (second class), and a cab and such like. And I'll give you a trifle for clothes every quarter regular, as we may agree upon. If your heart is good towards me, you might lose no time and be with me by Thursday first. For I am just wearying for you, my dearie! And give my respects to madame. Maybe she'll come up in holiday-time and pay us a visit. It is always a treat to look on the Highlands, and you'll be bonnier than ever when you live in the sweet mountain air. Now just answer straight, and as you answer, so I'll be your loving uncle or no.

"ALEXANDER CRAIG."

"Well," said Madame Debrisay, her countenance falling, "I always expected it. What'll you do, dear?"

"Do?" repeated Mona slowly. "I scarcely think I have any choice. You see, he voluntarily removes all cause of complaint; but it is hard to leave you, Deb."

"It is cruelly hard to let you go; but I must. Now, Mona, my dear, be careful in answering that letter. You must show him that you are sacrificing independence to nurse him. And do not commit yourself to stay with him always."

"How can I bargain with a poor old man that loves me?"

"He loves his 'siller' better! You must not sacrifice yourself, Mona. Let me write what I want you to say, and you can modify it if you like; but you must let him see that you are giving up independence for his sake. Now is the time to make a *clientele*, and you resign the chance."

"Very well, Deb. In such a matter two heads are better than one. There is one point I will stipulate for—a yearly holiday to come and see you! That will revive me, and you too, will it not?"

"Ah, my darlin' child, it will indeed!"

The tears sprang to Madame Debrisay's bright, expressive eyes, and leaning towards her beloved pupil, she kissed her affectionately.

"Now, dear," she continued, "let us get rid of the breakfast things, and concoct our famous letter."

It was a piece of work not to be quickly done. The collaborators had wide differences of opinion as to what was and was not to be insisted upon. Mona had mostly her own way, but nevertheless was a good deal influenced by her friend's shrewd advice.

Finally, the letter was despatched. As soon as the post could bring a reply came another epistle agreeing to everything, and expressing Uncle Sandy's extreme satisfaction. He gave his niece a few commissions to execute respecting books, papers, etc., and promising to subscribe to an Edinburgh circulating library, that they might have entertainment and instruction in the long winter nights.

The ensuing week was a busy one. London dressmakers were not to be thoughtlessly left behind. Preparations for a prolonged sojourn in comparative wilds were to be made. And Mona dearly

loved becoming dress and pretty things. Still madame preached economy, and the necessity of considering Mona's tiny capital as too sacred to be touched.

"You never know, dear, when the rainy day may come. So if you take a trifle now, be sure you pay it back when you get your first quarter. And now and again send me what you can spare to put away for you."

"Yes! I promise, Deb."

"And if your uncle gives you a present of money, save it up. I is an awful thing to feel you haven't a penny, as I did when I had buried poor Debrisay. How I ever got through, God only knows."

"He helped you, dear Deb, because yu helped yourself."

Madame was lost in thought, and did not reply.

"I'd have a dinner dress, though!" she exclaimed suddenly; "a dinner dress of black satin and jet lace. You'd look as fair as a lily in it; and some blush roses on your shoulder, to show you were not in mourning."

"I have two dinner dresses, you know, that only need a little doing up. And probably I shall never need such a thing."

"You don't know! When Lady Finistoun is your neighbour, you can't refuse to dine with her. I should not be surprised if all the lairds in the country side were to lay themselves at your feet. They don't often see anything like you!"

Mona laughed heartily at her imaginative friend, and then the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a letter from Kenneth—very hastily but joyously written. He was full of the anticipated pleasure of meeting Mona, and told her that Mary Black was to be in Glasgow staying with some relations, and he would get leave to stay a day, and would also introduce his lady-love to his cousin. Uncle Sandy, he said, had quite "perked up" since he knew Mona was coming, and, in short, life looked like a sunny, unruffled lake, *pro tem.*, to the sanguine young Highlander.

Then the hour of parting came soon—too soon.

What sandwiches Madame Debrisay cut, what biscuits and grapes she bought, how neatly she did them all up in a picturesque little basket with loving care, may be imagined.

She loaded her "dear child" with all kinds of little, useful presents, and she sent a warm waistcoat of her own knitting to Uncle Sandy, in preparation for the winter.

"I want to stand well with him, dear, for your sake; and he never quite took to me."

Finally she parted from Mona with nearly dry eyes.

"Why should I make her heart ache," thought the kindly woman.

But she was deeply gratified by the profound regret with which Mona bid her good-bye.

"My only idea of home is with you, dear Deb. You shall have a letter every week, and you must write regularly too."

So madame stood smiling to the last, till the last glimmer of red light at the end of the train had vanished, and then went to have it out unrestrainedly with her sorrow.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AMANG THE HEATHER.

CRAIGDARROCH was a beautiful secluded spot on the side of the advanced post of a mountain range which upheaved its crests further inland. It looked west upon the loch (an inland sea), which lay directly beneath it, and south towards the moor which trended to the east. The wild stretch of rocky heather up-land, called Strathairlie deer forest lay to the north, and directly at the other side of the hill, barely three miles distant, the shooting lodge of Lord Finistoun.

The house was old, grey, and rambling, having been much to ; and thanks to the shelter of the hill, boasted the ornate surrounding woods, not only of fir trees, but beech and nut oaks. It had been the residence of the old lairds of Strat. They had passed away long ago, and their lands had been among different purchasers. The Lord Finistoun of that day bought the deer forest and built the lodge. A Glasgow man had bought the house, the home, and two or three other farms formed the estate of Craigdarroch, for a summer residence failed, and it was again brought to the hammer, when Sand became the possessor, for a sum decidedly below its real value also bought a good deal of the furniture, establishing himself much glee. But it was somewhat late in life to change his. Farming proved a costly amusement. The want of steady employment made him irritable, and a cheese-separating as regarded the consumption of coal, coupled with the damp mid-winter on the western coast, induced rheumatism. So Craig thought himself in a very bad way, and betook him to London for superior medical advice, with the results we have

The fortune which hard work, coupled with the whim of a testator had brought him, did not bestow much happiness. proud to be Craig of Craigdarroch ; it sounded territorial, the signifying "Rock of the Oaks," was a happy accident ; but nervous in the lonely mansion, yet was never quite content from it.

The shootings attached—a piece of moorland, not very extensive—was alive with birds, let well in the season, and although of sport as "just a play for fules," he never disdained to attend.

The place seemed to him after his long absence at once more beautiful and more intolerable than it used to be. He longed to show it to Mona. He longed to hear her exclamations of delight at its beauty, and to display so distinguished-looking a creature as his niece and adopted daughter—for pride was a very ruling passion in the heart of Sandy Craig.

Still, it cost him a severe mental struggle to yield to his strong desire for Mona's company, as to write the letter above quoted. Once done, he was feverishly eager to reap the fruits of his surrender, and reckoned the days till Mona made her appearance.

After a fatiguing journey, for the night was warm, Mona found herself at Glasgow in the grey of the morning. Early as it was, Kenneth, "In the garb of old Gaul," awaited her on the platform. He looked so martial and magnificent, that Mona did not recognise him at first. When she did she was disposed to laugh at what she considered his "fancy dress." He assured her, however, that it was his habitual costume when among the hills, and that the only difference he had made was to put on his best go-to-meeting kilt and plaid in her honour.

"Not altogether in *my* honour, Kenneth," she said, when having collected her luggage they had time to exchange a few words.

"Well, maybe not," he returned, with a happy smile. "Now, if we leave by the one-twenty train for Kirkcaldy, we'll get to Craigdarroch by six o'clock. My uncle agreed not to expect you before, so you can come away to Mrs. Robertson's, where you can rest and have breakfast. She is a *very* old friend of Mrs. Black, and Mary is just waiting to welcome you. She is wearying to know you, though she will be half frightened at so grand a young lady as you are."

"Grand! Why, Kenneth, you are chaffing me!"

He only laughed, and calling a cab they drove away through dull streets, as yet scarcely astir, to the modest mansion of a Free Kirk minister, who was already in his study, and came forth to welcome the stranger lassie with kindly warmth; then his wife appeared, as neat and well-appointed in her cotton morning-dress as though she had made an afternoon toilette; and lastly, Mary, blushing, with downcast eyes and a sweet smile flickering on her lips. The first thing Mona noticed was the golden-red tinge in her soft, abundant hair.

"If mine is half as pretty, I am content," she thought as she offered her hand, and said kindly,—

"I am very pleased to meet you."

The words—the tone in which they were said—made Mary look up, and then the smile shone out of her honest, light blue eyes: these, and a red-lipped mouth rarely quite closed over very white teeth, redeemed her face from plainness. Her complexion, though clear and good, was much freckled, and the cheek bones were somewhat high; still Mary Black was undoubtedly a "bonnie lassie."

and pleasant to look at, as Kenneth evidently thought, as his face beamed whenever his eyes fell upon her.

"You'll be awful tired after so many hours in the train; here Mary, take Miss Craig to the spare room. You'll maybe like to wash your hands and brush your hair a bit before you eat your breakfast?"

"Thank you; I feel I need ablution sorely."

"I am so very pleased to see you," said Mona, when she and Mary had entered the sacred precincts of the spare room.

"And so am I to meet you; Kenneth told me what a good friend you have been to him; but you are not a bit like what I expected to see."

"I suppose not; people never are like what is expected."

"I will leave you now; ring when you are ready, and I will show you the way to the breakfast-room."

At the table were gathered the minister's younger bairns; a big-boned lad of fourteen; a slight, thoughtful boy of nine or ten—both silently intent on finishing their morning meal, to be off in good time to school—and a chubby girl of six, evidently the pet of the family. The mother told with pride that their eldest boy was away doing weel in Japan, and another daughter had married in the spring, and was living in Liverpool.

The long, devout grace, the bowls of porridge and cups of milk, the voices, the dialect, all seemed to Mona like a chapter out of a Scotch novel; yet it took her fancy. The kindness and frank hospitality had about them a self-respecting restraint—a thoughtful tone—that gave the impression of sincerity. She was struck with the superior softness and sweetness of Kenneth's and Mary's voices, and recognized in them types of a very different race from that of minister and his family.

The host appeared to be acquainted with Mr. Craig, and spoke of him with a touch of dry humour here and there which showed he was fully alive to the peculiarities of his character. Mr. Robertson—a pleasant, well-read man, quite abreast of the modern thought movement—seemed pleased to converse with his young English guest. Both his wife and Mary Black evidently looked upon him as something quite too immensely clever to be addressed save with due consideration, and Kenneth, too, regarded him as a superior being. As soon as he had bestowed the final blessing, the minister bade Mona farewell as he was going out.

Then Mary assisted Mrs. Robertson to clear away the breakfast things, and the latter said,—

"You three young folk will have a good deal to say to one another, so you can have it out here, while I am busy above and below, so soon as I have sent Jamie off to school."

"I should think we *had* a good deal to say to each other," said *Kenneth*, as soon as they were alone. Mary knows that the only

bit of comfort I ever had in yon big dreary town was when I would walk and talk with you, Mona, and that kind soul Madame Debrisay ! Isn't it curious when I was with you in London, I thought I saw such a likeness between you and Mary, and now you are together, it has just vanished away ? ”

“ Like Miss Craig ? ” cried Mary, blushing and laughing. “ Eh, Kenneth, but your eyes must have been all wrong ! ”

Then a very confidential conversation ensued, and Mona promised to help the lovers in all ways. Indeed, her heart went out very warmly to the gentle, simple Highland lassie, and she privately congratulated Kenneth on his choice.

Having been taken to see the Cathedral and some public buildings, she was given luncheon and hurried away to the station.

A splendid sunset was glorifying moor and mountain, the loch, and a distant glimpse of blue sea, when the travellers reached Kirk-toun, where a very rusty old one-horse phaeton, driven by Uncle Sandy himself, awaited them.

“ Well, my dearie, the sight of you is good for sair een ! ” he cried with unusual warmth, reaching down a hand to assist his niece to a seat beside him ; adding in the same breath, “ and I am right glad you have seen the error of your way. I am always ready to forgive, when I see anyone in their right mind. ”

“ I am very glad to see you, uncle. What delightful air ! It is like new life to breathe it. ”

“ Ay, it is just that ! You'll grow strong and weel. Hoo's a' wi' ye', Kenneth ? Did you see Mr. Macray, and get the papers ? Eh, we canna carry the twa big boxes. Can ye do without them till to-morrow, Mona, and I'll send the cart for them ? ”

“ Yes, uncle. I have my hand portmanteau, which is quite enough. ”

Kenneth scrambled in behind, and after one or two stoppages at shops of the “ general ” order, they quitted the primitive little town—which is a convenient stopping and starting-place for tourists and sportsmen—and proceeded towards Craigdarroch, by a road which skirted the loch, traversed a pine wood, wound round the head of the water, and then ascended between picturesque rocks crowned with heather and waving bracken, or wound through clumps of fir and oak trees which grew in sheltered hollows, or led round some projecting angle of the hill, from which could be seen a wide stretch of mountain and moorland, all rich and varied with autumnal green, brown, purple, and gold, a dozen different tints melting into each other, while away over the sea the sun was sinking in a flood of golden light.

The old cart horse that with bent head and patient toil dragged the vehicle up the long ascent, evidently understood his task too

well to heed Uncle Sandy's "gee-ups" and occasional application of the whip. When they came to a gentle decline or a few yards, he broke into a slow heavy trot—his great feet beating road like sledge hammers; then at the first upward tendency deliberately checked his pace to a steady walk, from which not could move him. Yet Mona enjoyed the drive immensely. beautiful wild scenery; the soft delicious honey-sweet breeze, from time to time touched her cheek like a caress; the silence, and perhaps, more than all, the unusually happy expression of Uncle Sandy's puckered face, gave her profound pleasure.

At length, after following a low moss and grass-grown wall some way, they turned into a narrow road, at the divergence of which a wooden gate, with one broken hinge, lay helplessly open.

"Noo," said Mr. Craig, with all the pride of proprietors, "you are in the parks of Craighdarroch."

"What a delightful country. What a pretty place."

"Wait till you are up at the hoose. I think you'll say it is better than Westbourne Villas."

The "hoose" was turned in a contradictory manner with its front to the hill, and built of melancholy, half-mourning grey stone. Within, a short wide hall lighted from above led to the public room, and from it a passage branched off to the sleeping chambers, and a narrow crooked stair led to various apartments above—for most of the house was only one storey high. The drawing-room had a fireplace, and a window, from the centre of which steps led down to a pleasant ground, consisting only of grass and groups of trees which grew abundantly in the shelter of the hill—but the view atoned for the deficient ornamentation. From this opened a pleasant room which the Glasgow occupier had added a square projecting window—also opening like a door. This had some bookcases and a writing table, and was dignified by the title of the library. A good dining room with ordinary windows—for the ground sloped steeply away from that side of the house—and a long narrow apartment contained some glass cases of birds and butterflies, some fossils, a rusty corner more or two, and the skeleton of a deer's head and antlers, which was termed "the Museum"—these constituted the reception room.

At the door stood a respectable grey-haired "dour" looking woman—the cook and general servant—and behind, the "bit lass" who helped her.

"Whaur's the boy?" asked Mr. Craig, descending with the help of his stick and Kenneth's arm.

"He's gane awa to the forge; the grey meer cast a shoe as he was drawing ben the gravel for yon new walk."

"Ah, and the gardener?"

"Oh, he's awa till his tea."

"Then, Kenneth, ye must put up Brownie; and give him a good rub down, he's just steaming."

Mona thought that a woman, a girl, and a boy were a scanty staff for so large a house, and foresaw housekeeping difficulties.

"This is my niece, Miss Craig," said Uncle Sandy to the "dour" looking woman; "ye'll just do a' she tells ye."

"She'll likely not know our ways, and she frae the south," she returned sulkily.

"Then you must teach me," said Mona, smiling so pleasantly on her, that her faced relaxed.

"Folk learn quick if they are so minded," she said, less harshly.

Then Uncle Sandy led Mona through the museum, the dining-room, the drawing-room, the library.

"You see it's no a poor hoose," he said, with satisfaction. "Noo, come awa to your ain bed-chamber. You'll like it fine, I am thinking." Uncle Sandy stumped down the passage and introduced his niece to a pretty airy chamber, the windows of which looked over the garden, with a side glimpse of the loch. "My room is next you. I thought if I were sick, or bad with the rheumatics, it would be well to have you nigh hand me. I have had a bell put there, ye see, just over the head of your bed. I can reach the rope frae mine, and wake ye any time I want ye."

"A delightful arrangement," said Mona, laughing. "It is a charming room, and when I unpack I shall make it look quite pretty. The house has evidently been arranged by men, uncle; it seems awfully bare."

"Aweel, women have their uses. If I had been able to marry the lassie I loved, I would be a different mon this day."

Mona soon found that life at Craigdarroch, in spite of the beauty that surrounded her, was not a bed of roses.

Mr. Craig viewed housekeeping expenses through the small end of his mental telescope, and tried to keep them down to impossible limits; while at the bottom of his manly heart he feared Phemie the cook far too much to do more than grumble indefinitely.

"She is a wastefu' deil," he whispered to his niece, the second day of her sojourn at Craigdarroch, when he was solemnly handing her the keys, and instructing her in the duties of her new position. "You can look after her better than I can. She just drinks pounds o' tea; twa ounces ought to do her and the girlie for a week; and then the flesher's bill is just fearfu'. They twa want good meat weals every day."

"But, uncle, they must have meat every day—no one would serve you without it."

"Weel, it's just, a bad new fashion. Scotchmen grew to be what they are on good oatmeal."

"I shall do my best, uncle, but I am not economical, I warn you. I know what it cost Madame Debrisay and myself to exist, and it will be a sort of guide. May I look at your books?"

"Books! I never keepit ony. I just know the siller slips away ower fast."

"No wonder you think so, if you keep no accounts. I will not undertake impossibilities, but if I do not give satisfaction, you must turn me away. Craig of Craigdarroch ought to live like a gentleman."

"Eh, but that's weel said!" cried Uncle Sandy, with sudden enthusiasm, which showed Mona she had hit the right nail on the head. "Weel, do your best, dearie; but you mauna ruin me."

"I will try not, uncle."

So Mona took up her cross with courage and found, as is often the case, that difficulties vanished at the touch of a bold hand.

A week of this new life passed rapidly. Mona found her hands full; nor was the work unpleasant. Her nature was essentially feminine. She loved order and delicate nicety in her home, and thought no trouble too much to secure it. Fortunately she succeeded in winning the allegiance of the cook, who, having anticipated that the stinginess of her master would be intensified by the minute inspection of a mistress, was relieved to find a greatly-increased degree of justice and liberality in the domestic government.

The furniture, too, vexed her soul. It was excellent as regarded quality, but frightful in form and colour. With much persuasion she induced Uncle Sandy to permit of her ordering pretty coloured muslin curtains, a few cheap oriental rugs, and some small etceteras, the choice of which Mona confided to Mary Black. These, with sundry baskets and pots of flowers disposed about the drawing-room, so transformed it that Uncle Sandy scarcely recognised the once stiff and dreary chamber.

"You're a clever lassie," he cried. "You have made the place look grand at no great outlay. Noo, I'm hoping you'll no ask mair siller for a long time."

"We shall want some additions to our furniture and decorations, uncle, before winter," returned Mona, who had learned from experience that the less Uncle Sandy was asked for, the less he was inclined to give. "But I will tell you about them in good time. Now that you are going to reside here, you must have your house nice. I think you ought to be obliged to Miss Black for the trouble she has taken."

"Weel, and who says I am not! She and her people are Kenneth's friends, hey?"

"They are. They were so kind and hospitable to me when I arrived, weary and wayworn, in Glasgow, that I should like immensely to ask her to spend a few days here on her way home, if you would permit me. She is a nice girl. I am sure you would like her."

"Oh! ay, you may ask her as much as you like. Can she sing a Scotch sang?"

"I have no doubt she can. That reminds me, we must have the piano tuned."

"Tuned! Why it was tuned before I left hame, and has no been played upon since."

"My dear uncle, the mere lapse of time has reduced it to a sad condition."

"And whaur—whaur is the tuner to come from?"

"Cannot Kenneth find out?"

"Aweel, we'll ask a bit at Mr. Macintyre's" (the grocer and general dealer). "We are going into the town after dinner. I have to see the gentleman that has taken the moor about the fishing, or one of the gentlemen. There's a pair of them, and one has only just come down."

"Who are they?" asked Mona carelessly, as she sewed on the band which had come unstitched from her uncle's umbrella.

"Oh! a Colonel Langton, and another fresh from India, a grand mon, a Sir something Lisle."

"There's your umbrella, uncle. I think Phemie wants one or two things from Macintyre's: I will give Kenneth a list."

"Eh, it's just want—want—want—from ae week's end to another."

"Of course it is, uncle; are we not always consuming things, and they must be replaced. Then I may write to Miss Black."

"Ay, she'll tell a' the folk in Glencorrie what a grand place Kenneth is in."

"Yes, of course she will."

Mr. Craig took his umbrella, and with a muttered complaint that his "puir back was awfu' bad the day," hobbled off with the accompanying knock knock of his supports on the floor, to worry the gardener.

Mona took a book and sat down on the step outside the large window, gazing away over mountain, lake, and moorland, which lay steeped in the golden sunshine of a brilliant autumnal noon, a light, slow-sailing cloud now and then casting a shadow upon the varied surface beneath it, a light breeze occasionally rippling the face of the loch and sending up its gentle current to breathe the soft briny freshness it had brought from the sea, against her cheek and through the meshes of her red-gold hair.

She could not read; her uncle's words had sent her thoughts back to that first vivid season of her real life, when she had drunk so deeply of pleasure and pain.

St. John Lisle was within a few miles. She might possibly meet him in her rambles or her drives with her uncle, and how should she feel if they stood face to face? Her heart answered, "slightly curious, but quite unmoved." Yes, to her infinite satisfaction, she felt a profound conviction that Lisle could never again stir in her emotion of any kind. She might even be amused with his cool, crisp talk, if he deigned to bestow any of it on her; she had even

forgiven herself her weak credulity, and could smile at her youthful folly in accepting Lisle's veiled attentions and ardent though indefinite expressions of admiration, as meaning anything real. It was all so completely past—though little more than three years had elapsed since they had met and parted—that she felt as if she could meet exactly as though they had never met before. The man she had loved so shyly and warmly had vanished, with the actual St. John Lisle she was barely acquainted.

Then the scenes which preceded Mrs. Newburgh's death arrayed themselves distinctly before her. How glad she was that her poor grandmother had the comforting conviction that her beloved Mona would be provided for by a happy marriage; yet to procure that assurance poor Waring had been lapped in elysium for a few short weeks, and then thrown aside when no longer needed.

"I almost wish I could have loved him," she murmured; "he was, and no doubt is, a really good fellow. But it was impossible, even if he had had the sort of manner and bearing that were so imposing in Captain Lisle. I could not have loved him *then*. Why is it that attractive outward seeming is so seldom a sign of inward and spiritual grace? There is no use in asking such questions, and I am losing a precious chance of reading."

She applied herself diligently to her book. In truth she had but little time to herself. When Uncle Sandy was in the house he kept her constantly with him reading aloud or writing the few letters he required to indite, or, worst of all, going over his accounts, for although he "could na' be fashed wi' hoose accounts," he kept his affairs rigidly in order, his proudest achievement and deepest delight being to effect large savings out of the sum he permitted himself to spend annually—that was so much clear gain. Then there was the direction of the small household—the providing for its needs. Her greatest relaxation was a ramble alone, or with Kenneth, which latter was a rare indulgence; her truest enjoyment writing and hearing from Madame Debrisay.

The delight of Kenneth when he heard of the success which had attended Mona's sudden inspiration suggesting the invitation to Mary Black, cannot be easily described. His dark eyes were aglow with pleasure from the time he heard of it. His gratitude to his benefactress was unbounded. He was indefatigable in his efforts to oblige everyone. He managed to secure the services of a wandering tuner—he drove a wonderfully successful bargain in the purchase of some sheep—and otherwise distinguished himself. At length the happy day arrived when he was to go into Kirkcubright to meet the expected visitor, who was to reach that station at half-past one. Mona had made all due preparation for her guest, and sat down to read the *Times* to Uncle Sandy in the drawing-room. They had not long been thus employed when the sound of wheels upon the gravel attracted their attention.

"It canna be Kenneth, yet," said Uncle Sandy, glancing at the clock.

"No, he has hardly reached Kirkcubright yet," returned Mona.

"There is a gentleman wants to speak wi' you," said the little help, coming into the room in the neat cap Mona insisted on her wearing.

"Aweel, put him in the museum," replied her master.

"Eh, but he's just behind me!" cried the girl, stepping back, whereupon a gentleman in shooting dress walked in, his cap in his hand, a distinguished-looking man, with an embrowned face, rather light eyes, and thick moustache.

"You will, I hope, excuse—" he was beginning in the clear, haughty voice Mona remembered so well, when his eyes met hers, and he stopped, growing suddenly silent with surprise.

Mona laid aside her paper, and rising, advanced quietly, saying, as she did so—

"How do you do, Captain Lisle!"

"Miss Joscelyn! This is quite an unexpected pleasure!" he exclaimed, taking the hand she offered, and evidently more moved than she was.

"Hoo's this? Do you know Sir St. John Lisle?" cried Mr. Craig.

"I used to know Captain Lisle," returned Mona, smiling, and looking steadily at him.

"I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Joscelyn in London some years ago."

"There's no Miss Joscelyn here," interrupted Uncle Sandy impatiently. "This is my niece—my puir brother's daughter—Miss Craig."

"Oh, indeed! forgive the mistake."

He paused, and for a few short seconds seemed less self-possessed than Mona could have imagined possible.

"I suppose," he resumed, in his natural tone and manner, "you are spending the autumn in this beautiful spot. Really, Mr. Craig, you have a superb view—the finest I have yet seen since I came up here," and he advanced to the window, his eyes glancing quickly from the view he praised to Mona's face, which he scanned with a curious, questioning glance.

"It's weel enough," said Uncle Sandy, swelling with pride in his possessions, "and I'm glad you are pleased with it; and noo, what's yer wull?"

"Oh—ah—I brought you a letter from Mr. Macfarlane's agent. You will see what he says about your rights of fishing, and how far they extend. It seems M'Gregor has let his fishing to Lord Finistoun, and I am now on my way to Strathairlie to see what we can do in the way of mutual accommodation. Have you seen Lady Finistoun yet? You used to be great chums, I remember," addressing Mona.

"I did not know she had arrived."

"They came last Saturday," said Lisle, handing the letter he had spoken of to Mr. Craig, who put on his glasses and proceeded to read it with great deliberation.

"Does *she* know you are in this part of the world?" continued Lisle, letting his eyes rest on Mona with the peculiar lingering gaze that used to disturb her—even now it cost her an effort to meet them with a smiling, unembarrassed look, but she succeeded, as she answered—

"No; I rarely hold any communication with her; when we meet, she is as nice and sweet as ever."

"Perennial charm and sweetness seem to be the peculiarity of your race!" he returned, with a caressing smile.

Mona slightly raised her eyebrows, and observed—

"Bertie is not exactly fascinating."

"Bertie, no, of course—"

"I'm thinking there is a contradiction somewhere," interrupted Mr. Craig, looking up from the letter he had been reading. "I will just look for the letter I had frae Balmuir himself. I have it somewhere," and taking his stick he walked away into his library.

"What an extraordinary, delightful surprise to find you here!" exclaimed Lisle, rising and coming over to the window where Mona sat, and leaning his shoulder against the frame. "I never was more amazed than when my eyes fell upon you. Is this old—gentleman really your uncle?"

"Really and truly my father's elder brother. You see, I have reverted to my natural grade."

"I feel all at sea," said Lisle slowly, his eyes still dwelling on her. "Do you know, I watched the papers for the announcement of your marriage for months, then I wrote to Bertie Everard, and heard from him that you had thrown over the poor devil I had been envying, and disappeared in the deepest disgrace with everyone."

"How very good of you to take so much interest in a person you were not likely to see again!" said Mona, looking up in his face with a half smile.

"I *always* hoped to see you again."

"Really?" archly.

"You knew I did!" returned Lisle quickly.

"I knew nothing about you, except that you were an amusing partner, and waltzed remarkably well—almost as well as you thought you did."

Lisle did not answer immediately; he pulled his moustaches, and looked thoughtfully out of the window.

"And did you discover your uncle soon after you left the Chase?"

"Not for a considerable time."

"And how did you manage?—I am dying to hear your history. *You will tell me everything, won't you? We were always sworn allies.*"

"Oh ! I have no story to tell. I have been extremely fortunate, and I have no claim on anyone's compassion."

A scornful smile curved her haughty mouth.

"No. I suspect you would very quickly throw it back in the face of any idiot who presumed to offer it ! But I shall see you again ; I hear your interesting relative approaching. I must see you again."

"There is no reason why you should not," returned Mona, with much composure.

As she spoke, Mr. Craig came in, the letter he had gone to seek for in his hand.

"I am right," he said exultingly, as he tumbled into a chair rather than sat down. "Balmuir himself writes to me on the 25th of June 1883 that he believes my rights extend as far as the cairn of Kilnethan ; and here"—striking the letter Lisle had brought with irritation—"his factor says I canna feesh below the grey stane dyke at the lower pool. Just read for yourself."

Lisle took both letters, and read them with an air of profound interest.

"There is a distinct contradiction," he said when he had finished.

"Suppose I take both up to Balmuir, and talk the matter over with him, and let you know the result. I do not wish to give you more trouble than I can help," he added courteously.

"You're varra polite. It would save me a good bit o' trouble. I'm a puir frail body, as you see, and noo, we'll be having dinner in a quarter of an hour, stay and tak' a bite. The boy shall put up your horse. You'll be late for lunch at the Lodge."

"Thank you," said Lisle, frankly and graciously. "I shall be most happy," his eyes seeking Mona's with a laughing glance.

"Just rin oot, dearie," said her uncle, "and tell Jamie to put the horse in the stable. The gig can bide in the yard."

"Pray, Miss—Miss Craig, allow me. I could not think of allowing you to be sent to—"

"You had better let me go. Probably Jamie would not attend to your orders," interrupted Mona.

She went away to deliver the message, and Lisle followed her.

"Is Donald at the stables," she added. "Make him attend to the horse. I am afraid of trusting your smart turn-out in Jamie's rude hands," she said to Lisle.

"He cannot do much harm. What a trump your uncle is to ask me to stay."

"And how very much bored you will be before the mid-day meal is over."

"I am ready to risk that."

Mona turned to re-enter the drawing-room.

"Are there not gardens or ferneries or something to look at?" asked Lisle insinuatingly.

"Yes, we have very good gardens. Would you like to see them?"
 "Certainly; above all things."

"Very well. Uncle Sandy," she said, opening the door, "I mean Sir St. John Lisle would like to see the gardens."

"Varra weel. I'll be prood to show them;" and Uncle Sandy leant over the arm of his chair to pick up his stick, which as usual had fallen on the carpet.

"I will stay to receive Miss Black, who must soon be here," Mona gently, as she took up her work and resumed her seat by window.

Lisle cast a backward glance at her as he left the room—a glance she did not pretend to see. As soon as she was alone her head dropped into her lap—a grave, almost sad expression crept over her speaking face, which had worn so bright and amused an aspect, when she remembered the sharp pain, the corroding mortification that had eaten into her soul, and for which she had to thank the pleasant-mannered, distinguished-looking man who had just left her.

"All's well that ends well," she murmured, rousing herself. "It is all past now, and left not even a scar. I did not think his presence would have moved me so little. I will never avoid him or seem unfriendly, but I defy him to flirt with me if I do choose. I hope he is enjoying his ramble with Uncle Sandy."

Here the sound of wheels upon the gravel drew her to the entrance in time to see the phaeton drive up, wherein sat Kenneth triphantly, and Mary Black beside him.

Mona welcomed her cordially. It was refreshing to meet honest eyes, to hear the frank unsophisticated voice of the simple natural Highland lassie.

"I am so glad to see you. Uncle Sandy has gone out round the garden with a gentleman, so I will show you your room at once. She is looking blooming, Kenneth,—better than when we met her in Glasgow."

"I am so glad to see you a bit alone before I meet Mr. Craig," said Mary, as she followed Mona down the long passage to her room. "I am very frightened of him."

"But you must not be so," said her young hostess. "My uncle likes those least who fear him most."

"It was so good of you to ask me. Kenneth told me all about you, and mother bid me present her best compliments to you."

Then they had a little cheerful talk about the most becoming mode of dressing the hair, with a few words on the prevailing fashion of morning frocks; after which it was time to go to the drawing room, which they hardly reached before the bell rang.

Mona could hardly repress a smile when Uncle Sandy appeared followed by his guest. Lisle looked rather grave, but Mr. Craig bore an air of self-satisfaction, which spoke volumes as to the amount of *boring* his victim had endured.

"And this is Miss Black? I am weel pleased to welcome her to Craigdarroch. Any friend of Miss Craig's, my niece, is welcome to me, especially a bonnie lassie like you. Sit ye doon, sit ye doon." And he proceeded to ask a blessing of portentous length.

The mid-day meal proceeded very successfully. To Mona's surprise, Lisle made himself very pleasant, listening to all Uncle Sandy said with interest, and just enough difference of opinion to stimulate the old man to triumphant argument. He seemed to enjoy the very simple food set before him, and discussed fishing with Kenneth, inviting him to spend a day on the river's side, occasionally sending a half-admiring, half-defiant glance to Mona, which seemed to say that he was not to be easily shaken off. Seeing that it made Mary blush painfully to be noticed, he kindly left her alone. Directly to Mona he said very little, but he inquired if she had seen this or that periodical or quarterly, and offered to send them up to her. Finally, he was, he said, reluctantly obliged to take leave, and the whole party went out to see him start.

"I suppose I may give your love to Lady Finistoun, Miss Craig. She will be here to-morrow, I daresay, when she knows who is in her neighbourhood. Many thanks for your hospitality, Mr. Craig. I will come up again as soon as I have seen M'Gregor. Adieu."

A wave of the hand, an uplifting of his hat, he touched his spirited horse with the whip, and in another moment he was out of sight round the curve of the drive.

"What style there was about him," Mona could not help saying to herself. "What cool self-possession, and certainty of his own position. Strength is always attractive in a man. I almost wish I had never found him out," she thought.

"A varra reasonable, wise-like young mon, for ane in his position, and willing to hear truth from the lips of a thoughtful body. But he has his tempers, I'll be bound. He was justanither sort o' man the day I went to meet him—short-spoken and scornful-like. But I daursay he sune saw that Sandy Craig could hold his ain with s'body. Aha, lad, he's changed his tune the day! Come along, my bonnie bairn! Kenneth and me are going to our books, so Mona will take you round the gardens and the grounds, forbye the dairy."

CHAPTER XIX.

"TIS WELL TO BE OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE."

MONA felt younger and more like her old self after this meeting with Lisle than she had done since her grandmother's death. The encounter had proved to her how completely she had cast off the old feeling of regret and pain at her disenchantment, and showed her that she was stronger than of old. Still Lisle in a way interested her. His manners, when he chose, were attractive, though Mona fancied she could perceive the baser metal of selfishness underlying the silverplating of his effective exterior.

With all his Radicalism, Uncle Sandy was deeply gratified by the readiness of this fine gentleman to cultivate his acquaintance. He was remarkably amiable and serene during the whole afternoon and evening after Lisle's visit, although he held forth at some length on the folly and evil effect of titles on their possessors, as well as on society at large.

His placidity so soothed Mary Black's nerves that she was able to sing some Jacobite ballads without much trepidation, and in a voice so sweet and true that the absence of training was not perceived.

Uncle Sandy was highly pleased.

"Eh!" he said—a prolonged "Eh!"—"there's a Scotch song for you, Mona, and a Scotch voice! All the German and Italian growling and screeching couldna equal that! Even yourself noo—you have a pretty pipe of your own, but you canna give me a lilt like that."

"No indeed, uncle!" said Mona cheerfully. "One must be Scotch to sing Scotch as Mary does."

"Can you sing 'Bonnie Mary Hay,' my lassie?"

"Oh, yes, that I can!"—with a delighted smile. "It is just father's favourite."

And Uncle Sandy insisted on an encore.

Then Mona added her share to the concert, and Mary hung in genuine pleasure and admiration over the piano.

"Eh," she cried, "but you make the notes speak!"

So Mona proposed to give her a few lessons in piano playing, and all went well and happily.

"She is a douce, weel-edicated bairn," said Uncle Sandy, when Mona lit his candle and carried it for him to his room—a little attention he always looked for—"and *you* are wiselike to find so bonnie, weel-behaved a girlie to mak' friends wi'—nane of your upsetting taupies wi' neither brains in their heids nor hearts in their bodies. She can bide as long as you like, and sing for me every evening. Mak' them gang to bed, dearie; it's lang burning the lights."

"My dear Mary, you are a complete success!" cried Mona, when she returned to the drawing-room, and found her and Kenneth standing very close together in the window. "I do not know when my poor uncle seemed so happy and content. She will cut me out, Kenneth!"

"Ah! that she never will! Nor would she wish it. It was a lucky hour for us when I met you, cousin Mona."

"I am glad you think so, Kenneth. Now we are not to sit up burning lights," continued Mona, laughing.

"There's splendid moonlight, which costs nothing," returned Kenneth. "Let us blow out the candles and have a little talk before we go to bed; we have had scarce a word together yet."

The well-assorted trio sat for some time talking softly in the silvery radiance of the moon, the delicious perfume of the pine trees breathing on the cool night breeze—and then crept quietly to their respective chambers.

Lisle proved a true prophet. The day but one after his visit, Uncle Sandy and his guests had assembled in the library to their five o'clock tea. This was a serious meal, with bannocks and scones, cookies, bread and butter, preserves, and toast. It served to support nature till eight o'clock supper, after which came prayers and bed. Mr. Craig had just "asked a blessing," when the sound of an approaching carriage interrupted his attack on the toast and newly-made strawberry jam.

"It is another visitor," he said. "Why, one might as well be in Edinburgh or London."

"We had not many visitors in London," observed Mona.

As she spoke, Jessie, the youthful housemaid, came hastily into the room.

"There is a leddy speerin' for you, Miss Craig!" she exclaimed; "a gran' leddy, in a chaise wi' twa pownies."

"It must be Lady Finistoun," said Mona, rising. "I may bring her in, uncle?"

"Eh? Surely. Ask her to tak' a cup of tea."

Mona hastened to the door, before which, in a light basket carriage drawn by two wicked-looking dun ponies, sat Lady Finistoun, and beside her an elderly lady made up in the most youthful style.

"Ah! my dear Mona! So you are at home. I am so glad." She gave the reins to a smart, diminutive groom, and stepped out quickly, embracing Mona with effusion. Lady Finistoun continued, "I was so delighted to hear you were within reach. I have brought Miss Morton with me. You know Miss Morton? No! Oh, well, you ought; everyone knows her."

"Then I must be no one," said Mona, laughing. "I am very glad to see you, Evelyn. You must come in; we are at tea; my uncle begs you will join us."

Descending the steps, she courteously invited Miss Morton alight.

"Certainly, with pleasure," said that lady with much decision, followed by both new arrivals, Mona led the way to the lil

Miss Morton was very tall, and rather bony; her long neck surmounted by a small head and a face short and broad for its rather of the pug order, with small, keen, light-brown eyes. Her complexion seemed to have suffered a good deal from exposure to weather, and was considerably and undoubtedly powdered. She wore a very masculine-looking overcoat of light tweed with a cape, a small deer-stalker cap, and a white gauze veil tied round which at present was turned back with a curious effect. Lady Morton wore a heather-coloured costume, exquisitely draped and trimmed, buttons, gloves, hat with a pheasant's wing—all fitting to perfection, and admirably becoming to the pretty but rather plain face and dainty figure of the wearer.

"Uncle, let me introduce Lady Finistoun and Miss Morton to you," said Mona.

"I am sure I am verripleased to see our friends o' my nighly said Uncle Sandy, rising after two distinct efforts, and smiling at the visitors. Like most Scotchmen, he was much mollified by the sight of a pretty face. "Ye'll sit doon and tak' a cup of tea and a glass of wine after your drive. Here, Jessie, set a chair for me, and bring cups and plates. Where'll the ither gentlemen sit? Kenneth, mak' room 'twixt you and Mona."

"Thank you, Mr. Craig," said Lady Finistoun, in her soft, low tones; "a cup of tea will be most refreshing after our long drive for I stupidly lost my way, and my groom is a Londoner. I trust for guidance to Miss Morton, who thought she knew the way, but

"I *did* know the way," interrupted that lady, who was driving off her gloves in preparation for an attack on the good things before her. "You know when we came to where the road branched that the hollow you would keep to the left, though I said it must be the right. No, thanks, no preserve: I hate sweets. I will have some cream scones and one lump of sugar, please."

"I was so pleased to find Mona was here," resumed Lady Finistoun, as soon as her wants had been attended to. "I knew you lived here, Mr. Craig, for I have often heard Mona speaking of you and Sandy"—a fascinating smile and upward glance—"but she is a bad correspondent, she never let me know she was here; and as St. John Lisle had not come over to dine, we should not have troubled you out for ages. You take good care of her, Mr. Craig. I saw her look so well—not even when you came out, Mona."

"There is a remarkable fine air here; it's better than what we have over in Strathairlie," he returned. "You see, we are sheltered frae the north, an' we get mair sun—forbye the porridge. "I ~~must~~ insisted on her takin' porridge to her breakfast,"

"Porridge is exceedingly indigestible, and bad for the complexion," said Miss Morton between the mouthful of cream scones.

"Your're wrang!" cried Uncle Sandy. "Just look at the men and women that are reared on porridge! There's no their equals to be found on earth!"

"My dear sir, I don't imagine you have seen much of earth beyond your native land."

"You're wrang there again, mem. I've just come back from over a year's wandering wi' my niece about the continent of Europe; and there's little I saw there that I'd care to tak' awa."

"Ah, I see you are one of the large class who think their geese swans."

"I'm much obliged for your high opeenion, mem; but I am no such a fule-body. I have the maist intelligent men of all times on my side."

"Miss Morton has an intellectual lowe of argument," said Lady Finistoun soothingly, "and is generally in opposition to the foeman she considers most worthy of her steel. But I am anxious to see your charming gardens, if there is time after tea. Sir St. John Lisle tells me it is a gem of a place."

"Weel I hope you will come as often as you like to look at it," returned Uncle Sandy.

"It is admirably situated. A family place, I suppose?" asked Miss Morton, passing up her cup.

"Naw!" exclaimed Uncle Sandy; "I bought it wi' my ain hard-earned money."

"Oh, you lucky man! Of all the powers, the one I envy most is the power of making money."

"You have quite enough, dear," said Lady Finistoun. "Now, my dear Mr. Craig, I want you to spare my cousin to me for a few days. It is so long since we were together, and as we have rather a pleasant party, and the change—"

"She's no your cousin," said Uncle Sandy hastily; "she has no kin except me. Her grandmother's kin fell from her when she most needed them."

"But she is indeed my cousin; and through her I claim you, too, my dear Mr. Craig, as a kinsman, if you will permit the claim."

"It would be hard to say ye nay," he returned, a smile puckering up his self-satisfied face. "Mona may please herself."

"Do you always wear the kilt?" said Miss Morton abruptly to Kenneth.

"Mostly, when I'm amang the heather."

"It's very becoming," said she, with an admiring glance. "I do not wonder at Highland gentlemen wearing it; but you are all very conceited."

"I am sorry you think so."

"Don't you admit it?"

"I am not sure."

"Ah! that is the cautious Scot all over. Tell me, are you his nephew?" nodding in the direction of Mr. Craig.

"I am."

"And Miss Craig's brother?"

"No; my name is Kenneth Macalister."

"Ah! Highland to the backbone. Then is this young lady your sister?"

Kenneth and Mary blushed simultaneously.

"I see. No; certainly not," returned Miss Morton, with a harsh laugh. "Now, Mr. Macalister, the room is rather warm; haven't you a shrubbery or a garden, or something to show me? I don't care to sit here any longer."

Kenneth rose reluctantly.

"Oh, yes, I can take you for a stroll."

"I am going to look at the grounds," said the resolute spinster to her chaperon, "with Mr. Macalister."

"My niece will—" began Uncle Sandy, but Miss Morton promptly interrupted him.

"Oh, no, thank you; I don't want any young ladies; a Highlander is enough for me;" and she walked off, followed somewhat sheepishly by Kenneth.

"Milly Morton professes not to like women," explained Lady Finistoun, laughing.

"Mair's the pity," said Uncle Sandy dryly, "for I'm thinking few men would like *her*!"

"I assure you they do. She is very popular, and has had endless offers—to be sure, she has a good fortune."

"Weel, weel! siller is nae everything in a wife. Noo, if you'll tak' nae mair tea, I'll go round the grounds with you myself."

"Thank you;" and Lady Finistoun satisfied her host's hear with exclamations of admiration and delicately-administered flattery.

"Well, my dear sir, I must tear myself away. The shades of evening will be round us before we reach the Lodge, and I have no settled about Mona's visit."

"I just leave it to herself."

"What do you say, Mona?" turning to her.

"I think, dear, you had better not trouble about it. I do no care about going to you when you have a party; and I do not like to leave my uncle, so I shall wait till you and Lord Finistoun are alone, then I will spend a day with you, if you will have me."

"This is sheer nonsense. Finistoun charged me to secure you Bertie is coming too, and Lord Arthur Winton, and St. John Lisk. They will all be so pleased to see you."

"It sounds very ungracious, but I really have not the least wish to see them."

"Yes, it is, *most* ungracious; is it not, Mr. Craig?"

"Eh, I am no judge. Mona knows her own mind."

"Well, Mona, you cannot refuse to come to me next Thursday, the twenty-first. It is my boy's birthday. He will be a whole year old. You *must* come!"

"No, I cannot refuse. On that day I will dine with you. I want to see the dear baby again."

"Thank you, dear Mona! He has grown such a darling! Is there any use in trying to persuade *you* to join us, Mr. Craig?" she added insinuatingly.

"Not the least. I should nae be company for a set o' gay callants! I am a thoughtful mon and puir frail body."

"I think it would do you good to come to us. However, I shall hope Finistoun may succeed in persuading you. Now, where has Miss Morton wandered to with that good-looking Highlander? It will be dark before we can get home."

"I think they went round by the big oak," said Mona. "I will go and look for them."

When found, Miss Morton proposed—as it was only three miles to the Lodge by the short cut over the hill—to walk back under Kenneth's escort, a suggestion which evidently alarmed him.

This Lady Finistoun decidedly negatived.

"Don't talk such nonsense, my dear. Mr. Macalister would not get back till midnight, and you would be too late for dinner. Three miles over a hill top are equal to six on a flat road. Come, let us be going."

"You are a little tyrant," said Miss Morton.

"Will you walk with me to the gate, Mona, while they are bringing round the ponies. I am sure Mr. Macalister will come so far with Miss Morton."

"With pleasure!" cried Mona.

Having bid a cordial farewell to Uncle Sandy, and a civil good-bye to Mary, Lady Finistoun slipped her arm through Mona's, and they walked slowly down the approach.

"I have been dying to ask you a hundred questions, dear!" she exclaimed. "What a droll, intensely Scotch Scotchman your uncle is. Quite a character! I am sure he is very rich. Has he adopted you? Is he going to leave you all his money? Is 'young Lochinvar' a lover, or a rival near the throne? Tell me everything."

Mona laughed, and gave Lady Finistoun a slight sketch of the situation, in which that sympathetic young peeress was immensely interested.

"The 'braw Hielandman' is no doubt an excellent person," she said; "but I should like to see you sole heir to your uncle's wealth. I suppose he is very rich?"

"Not according to your standard, I imagine," returned Mona, "though I believe he could make Kenneth independent, and me, too; for I have found that woman wants but little here below to make her happy. Money cannot buy what is most essential."

"Oh, of course not ! Still one wants a few necessaries. I often wonder how poor Geraldine will get on. She will not hear of the horrors which wait on poverty."

"May I," began Mona, with a slight hesitation, "may I send my love to your mother ? I am so fond of her. And you know she had a right to be angry with me. I did not behave well to—"

"To poor Leslie Waring !" put in Lady Finistoun, as she hesitated. No, you did not ! Now, I daresay you are sorry for it ?"

"I am very sorry I pained him, but I am very glad I did not marry him. It would have been bad for both of us."

"Perhaps so. At any rate he is gone to the bad, so some one was telling me. He lost heaps of money on horses and at Monte Carlo ; and he got into an awfully fast set ; then he disappeared. They say he was last seen ploughing or breaking horses, or some such thing, in Texas. So, after all, he might have ruined you as well as himself if you *had* married him."

Mona was silent. Some voice in her heart told her that had she been his wife, the tender consideration he had always shown for her would have kept him straight. But she answered the suggestion by the old counter question, "Am I my brother's keeper ?"

"It grieves me to hear such an account of him," she said, after a few moments' silence. "He was kind and generous, and deserved a better woman than I am."

"Oh, you were always good ! I am sure we were all fond of you. My mother took your refusal to marry Mr. Waring dreadfully to heart ; but Sir Robert would not let her write to you. He was awfully angry. Then you know what heaps of things she always has to do, so I suppose she gradually forgot."

Mona was silent. While Lady Mary Everard forgot, she might have starved, though she acknowledged that she had no claim on Sir Robert Everard and his wife. Thank God ! there were true souls to be found with hearts *and* memories.

"You know, Mona, you are really lucky," Lady Finistoun was saying, when Mona listened again. "As soon as you threw away one fortune, you picked up another. I can see that the dear uncle is very fond of you, so—but," interrupting herself, "I hear the carriage. Yes ! and I protest Milly Morton has entrapped the handsome Highlander to come so far with her. She is an awful flirt—can't live without it, in fact ! She makes such a fool of herself sometimes."

Then came leave-taking, and the visitors drove off as the soft gloom of an autumnal night began to deepen in the east.

"Do you mind walking back by yourself ?" asked Kenneth. "I am going up the hill a bit to speak a word to Allan, the shepherd."

"Oh, no. I am only a few steps from our own road, and there is nothing to fear among these delightful hills."

"That's true. I'll be back before supper," and Kenneth went wittily on, with a free, swinging step.

und of his footfall had hardly died away than another
 ona's ear, and seemed to gain upon her. In spite of her
 that "there was nothing to fear," she felt an odd uneasi-
 , though not absolutely fear, was unpleasant; nor was she
 when a voice behind her said, "Good evening, Miss
 I did not hope to find you so far a-field." Then she was
 o pause to turn and greet Lisle, who soon overtook her.
 ed a gun on his shoulder, and was followed by a gillie with

g.
 is a piece of luck! I was shooting in this direction, so
 of taking Craigdarroch on my way back, to tell your uncle
 ve had no reply from Balmuir."

was annoyed at this *rencontre*. She wanted to walk back
 undisturbed thought. The report of Waring she had just
 d affected her. She was so sorry for him! And now came
 stir up the less worthy side of her nature—for Mona was by
 s an angel all around. She had debated with herself how
 ld treat him; not with resentment—that, she told herself,
 no right to feel; not with cold avoidance, which was her
 nclination, and which he would interpret into an expression
 asure; but with friendly, good-humoured indifference. If,
 med disposed to do, he again tried to amuse a passing hour
 ng love to her, she would accept it in a spirit of fun which
 ow out at intervals. He should never flatter himself again
 ade any serious impression on her.

I not take the message for you?" she said, looking up,
 smure smile. "It is a steep road to climb after your day's
 er the muir."

at! and leave your fair side all unguarded, lady?"

my fair side is accustomed to take care of itself very suc-
 "

may I confess to a low-minded hope that your uncle may
 o dinner?—though, by the way, I am scarcely fit to present

pe I must nip in the bud! We have dined."

t powers! Well, I need not lose this precious chance of
 to you. I suppose I shall never see you except through a
 ighland relations?"

it is not very likely."

ou knew how anxious I am to ask you a variety of questions,
 d give me some opportunity of a *tete-a-tete*."

can ask as many as you like? I have no secrets."

t! does your uncle know you refused Waring?"

do you know I did?"

I know how desperately in love he was, and it is currently
 that you did, and that he went to the bad in consequence!"
 sense!" cried Mona, a grave, hard expression replacing the

smile which had played round on her lips. "You and I, Sir St. John Lisle, have seen enough of the world we live in to know that women seldom have sufficient influence to make or mar any man's life."

"I am not so sure! I fancy if any woman ever had, you would be one of them."

He looked sharply at her as she spoke.

She laughed naturally and merrily.

"Considering the sort of women who are most influential, I do not think your opinion flattering."

"Why, do you not think good women influence us?"

"Not often, I fancy."

"You have grown worldly-wise since we met, Mona!"

"Does an absence of nearly four years make you more familiar with my name than you used to be?" she asked coldly.

"Yes," he returned, looking down into her eyes, "because I have thought of you so often, and called you Mona in my heart since we parted."

Mona met his eyes very steadily, while an amused expression crept into her own.

"Call me what you like in the inner region you term heart, but pray let your lips conform to the usages of this mundane society in which we live and move and have our being," she said carelessly.

Lisle was silent for a moment.

"I accept your rebuke," he said, "and will not again offend."

"Oh, I did not mean to rebuke!" said Mona good-humouredly — "only to remind."

"You have changed enormously!" resumed Lisle. "You seem years older."

"Thank you! That is a rare compliment."

"I will not be chaffed into retracing it. I meant that you seem more mature; and I find, as I always do, that the fruit is more heavenly sweet than even the blossom."

"Yet I imagine that anticipation is always better than fruition," said Mona, quite unmoved by the implied compliment.

They walked a few steps in silence, then Lisle exclaimed—

"What banishment it must be for you to live here with these very excellent people!"

"On the contrary, I feel quite at home. I am fond of my uncle because he is fond of me, and I find life quite endurable."

"Do you always love those who love you?"

"Yes, always."

"Except in poor Waring's case?"

"That was the exception which proves the rule. Probably should have been wiser had I conformed to your sound advice, turning to him with a frank, sweet smile, "but I cannot say I regret my rejection of it."

"I fear," said Lisle gravely, "that you no longer consider me a friend, as you used?"

"On the contrary, I am very pleased to welcome such a friend, after his long absence!"

"Thank you," and Lisle walked beside her in silence for a few minutes. "I see Lady Finistoun has not been long in finding you it," he resumed. "I met her just before I overtook you; she was accompanied by that fearful female, Miss Morton; have you ever met her before?"

"Never!"

"I wonder you have not. She is ubiquitous. She was the first person I recognized when I reached Bombay, and one of the first when I reached Kirkcubright. I wonder Lady Finistoun lets her make even a temporary settlement at the Lodge?"

A few more unimportant sentences brought them to the house, where they found Uncle Sandy enjoying forty winks, while waiting till the darkness had deepened sufficiently to render the lamp necessary. Mary was seated on the steps leading to the garden, reading by the fast-fading light.

"Eh! what's wrang?" cried Uncle Sandy, rousing up confusedly.

"Sir St. John Lisle has come to see you, uncle."

"What's his wull?" in an irritated tone.

"I am very sorry to disturb you; but I did not like to pass your house without calling to say that I have had no answer as yet to my letter, so we will keep well this side of the supposed boundary, and get into no trouble, till the matter is decided."

"Weel it canna be helpit."

"No, certainly not. May I leave you a couple brace of grouse, Mr. Craig? They are good plump birds."

"I am much obliged to you. They are fine and digestible food. Where are they?"

"The gillie is just outside with my bag."

"Mona, ca' Phemie to tak them!"

"Then I will not trespass on you any longer. Pray young ladies, do you not feel disposed to put me on my way? The moon is rising, and the walk back would be charming?"

Mary looked at Mona, evidently ready to return her good offices if necessary, but the other laughed, and said they could enjoy the view from the window without the trouble of walking. Lisle reproached both for refusing his request, and bidding them a gay good-night, departed on his homeward road.

"Aweel, I did na' want to hear he had nae letter?" murmured Uncle Sandy. "I'd rather have my bit doze than a' his birdies!" and settled to his nap again.

"Ah!" whispered Mary Black, "it's not the letter that brought him here. I am afraid but you are a hard-hearted lassie, Mona! He is a handsome, grand-looking gentleman."

CHAPTER XX.

EDGED TOOLS.

It was, on the whole, a bright time at Craigdarroch. Mona found Mary a very pleasant companion—a quiet, kindly, sensible girl, whose hearty admiration and profound faith was a gratifying tribute to her new friend. Uncle Sandy's uneasy pride had perhaps never before been so satisfactorily fed, and, like all things thus satiated, was lulled to sleep for the present. If at any time the currents of his temper flowed from the east, it was against Kenneth they chafed; and Kenneth was more inflexible than formerly. It was a great relief to Mona to have a partner in her readings and writing and general care of Uncle Sandy. Moreover, Mary had learned to play chess with her father, the schoolmaster, and allowed herself to be beaten with much tact—occasionally winning to keep up the illusion.

Amid this temporary tranquillity and comfort, Mona often thought of her dear, kind Deb; not that Deb would care for a life of inactivity and seclusion—busy days, occasional theatres, concerts, and soirees, where she might display a dainty and becoming cap, this was the existence which suited her. But by her own heart Mona knew what a blank her absence left in the warm-hearted, bright-spirited woman's life. She was therefore a most steady and satisfactory correspondent, giving a weekly picture of her days, and descriptions of her readings and musing. She made, however, very slight mention of Lisle; but slight as it was, it sufficed to set Malame Debrisay off.

"Your letter, as usual, reached me on Saturday. I can't tell you how I look forward to it; and it's like you, dear, to be so faithful in writing. You seem to have far better weather than we have in London; it is warm and damp, and the streets as greasy as if all the tallow-chandlers in town had poured grease over them. People are coming back, and my days getting filled up, so I feel less lonely than I did at first. Is it not a queer turn your meeting that nice, elegant Captain Lisle away there in the wilds. I always thought, and always will think, that he was a great admirer of yours; and if he had not been sent off to India just when your poor grandmother died, there's no knowing what might have happened. I hope, dear, you will not turn up your nose at him as you generally do—Lady Lisle would look well and suit you well. How does your uncle put up with such a thorough-going aristocrat? I hope you are keeping him (Uncle Sandy) well in hand; you must always remember the old lines, "Tender-hearted stroke the nettle," etc., etc.; and a catch thistle requires a firmer grip than anything else! I am not

"He is not nearly as good-looking as Kenneth," said Mona, laughing at Mary's evident delight in the discovery she thought she had made.

Meantime Lisle walked rapidly down-hill in the direction of the hotel where he and his friend put up, and thinking very earnestly of the interview he had just had.

In the new scenes and occupations of his life in India, he had lost much of the impression which the little episode of his intercourse with, and parting from, Mona had left.

Her breaking with Waring, after having accepted him, had been a mystery he could not fathom. As she seemed indifferent to himself, why did she not marry a rich, easy-going fellow, who would do anything for her! Had she fallen in love with any other man? Had she a secret history, which might account for her eccentric conduct?

"However that may be, she was fond of me once, in a proud, shy, reluctant way," he thought. "I was certain of it till that day when she took my advice about Waring so differently from what I expected. By Jove! I am right too! I have felt her tremble when I put my arm round her in a waltz, and it nearly made me make a fool of myself. What a charming figure she has. Her eyes too, they are darker and softer—but steady! There is a curious look of resolution in them when they meet mine. If I were her grandfather, she could not treat me with more friendly composure; she is gently, kindly indifferent, or acts it admirably, while I—I am harder hit than ever! I don't think I have myself so well in hand as I used. I must not be an ass, but I must and will break down that barrier of profound reserve she masks so cleverly behind her sweet, careless frankness. Does she resent the part I played? Pooh! A woman always forgives a lover who comes back with fresh fire after a short estrangement. I don't quite understand her—I must be careful. She is a most dainty morsel, and if I succeed—well I can afford myself even a wife according to my fancy now! and not be too much hampered with her after the bloom is off the grape! How in Heaven's name did she come to have such an uncle! She looks thorough-bred if ever a woman did! There is a sort of conscious power about her smile that stings a fellow's pride. I wonder if she is thinking of me? or of that other possible lover, whose existence would explain much? I wonder if that word of counsel I ventured to offer still rankles? Dare I explain it away? No, I dare not approach the subject. Well, I know women pretty well—give me time, and I think I shall win this puzzling girl. No one ever took such a hold on my heart—no, my fancy, before."

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sure I like all you tell me about your new friend Miss Black. Don't let her, or Kenneth either, get too strong a hold on the old gentleman. The Scotch are deep and deceitful, I have always heard. Now for some of my own news. I have some new pupils—two daughters of a Mrs. Rivers, who has lately come from India, and is giving these girls finishing lessons before taking them back with her. Lady Hayter recommended me. One of them (Miss Rivers I mean) has as much ear and as much voice as a crow. I told her mother it was robbery to take her money, for I could do her no good, and she wasn't pleased. The other girl has a sweet little pipe enough, so I go on with both of them. This, however, is a twist in the stream of my narrative. A few days ago I had stayed over my time, and Mrs. Rivers asked me to come in to luncheon. I was starving—talking and singing makes one fearfully hungry—so I went in. They were very pleasant, and had a nice curry.

"Presently a General something was announced, and a very grand old warrior marched in."

"A great, tall, thin man—a bag of bones you might say—with big black eyebrows, and angry-looking eyes; but his hair was white and his face brown, and he had an empty sleeve. He was named to me and gave me a stare, as much as to say, 'Who the deuce are you?' Then he began to talk in short sentences, and with what we might term a 'staccato fortissimo' manner. Somehow his voice and eyes seemed familiar to me, only I could not find a clear place for him in my memory. When he had eaten some curry—and abused it—and taken a glass of hock and seltzer, he said, looking at me as if he was going to accuse me of murder—

"What did you say this lady's name is?"

"Madame Debrisay," said Mrs. Rivers.

"Humph!" said he; "are you a Frenchwoman?"

"No," said I; "but I am next door to one—I am Irish!"

"From what part of that unfortunate country, may I ask?" more politely.

"From Ballykillruddery."

"Ah, I thought so!"

"And he was silent for a bit; then he said, with a pleasanter smile than I thought his grim face could put on—

"I see you have no recollection of me."

"Your voice and face are not strange to me," I said, my heart beginning to beat, "but I cannot recall your name."

"Have you quite forgotten a gunner called Fielden—Mark Fielden—who won the cup at the Ballykillruddery hunt races in '53, more than thirty years ago?"

"Do I not? And I helped to do up my cousin Rose Nugent's hair with ribbons of his colours for the race ball! I know you now, and I must shake hands with you!"

"So we shook hands; and his brown faced softened and glowed

while he talked of Rose. He was desperately in love with her, and they were engaged. He went off to India; she stayed at home—got a wetting out boating, took cold and went off in a decline. He married, and lost his wife, and now he is wandering about in indifferent health. I should not have mentioned all this if it had not been for a bit that will interest you. In the course of conversation, it turned out that the General is some relation of poor Mr. Waring's, and he is awfully vexed with him. It seems he has got through a heap of money, and has gone away to America. A friend of the General's saw him breaking horses last spring somewhere in California. I said I had met him, and what a good fellow I thought him. Then the General said he was an ass, and had let himself be knocked out of the running because he could not get the girl he wanted to marry him. Of course I did not let on that I knew anything about it, and the subject dropped. Then my old General asked for my address, and said he would come and see me some Sunday—which, I told him, was my only free day—but I don't fancy he will.

"Now, my darling, I have prosed long enough, and I must stop. When shall I see you again? Can't you persuade your uncle to come up to town for a little more physic? You make him too happy and comfortable. I was going to write, 'Don't refuse Sir St. John Lisle without thinking twice,' but I will not. Matrimony is a tremendous experiment, and I'll not venture to recommend it. God bless you, my own dear. My best respects to your uncle.—Ever your loving friend,
GERALDINE DEBRISAY."

Mona read this with the deepest interest. She smiled at the account of the meeting at Mrs. Rivers', but grew very grave over the description of Waring's decadence.

"Am I to blame? I wish I were not always having sidelong reproaches flung at me. He would have been as bad or worse, if I had married him, for I could not have been a loving, sympathetic wife, and then his last state and mine too would be worse than the first. How I wish I could hear that he was well and happily married."

The remembrance of his pained expression and quivering lips when he left her—after she had broken with him—haunted her for some time, as it always did, after it had been roused by any allusion to her rejected lover. But her housekeeping cares, the demands of Uncle Sandy, the pleasure of a ramble with Mary, helped to banish these unpleasant thoughts.

The Thursday on which Mona was to have a peep once more at the world she felt she had quitted for ever, rose fresh and clear after yesterday of storm and rain.

Lady Finistoun had offered to drive over after luncheon and fetch her, so Mona—relieved from the necessity of taking out Uncle Sandy's ramshackle conveyance—dressed, and having put up a carefully-arranged dinner dress and change of raiment, waited quietly for her ladyship's appearance.

Uncle Sandy had driven away early with Kenneth to a sale of Highland cattle at Kirkcoun, and Mary had gone to carry some jelly to the shepherd's mother, who was old and weak.

Mona was reading a review sent her by Madame Debrisay, when she heard the sound of a carriage driving up.

"She is earlier than I expected," was her mental comment as she glanced at the clock. "It is barely half-past three."

Voices were heard speaking in the hall, and Mona rose intending to go out and meet her friend, when the door opened, and Lisle entered unannounced, his hat in his hand, looking bright and brown. Mona coloured in spite of herself.

"Good-morning," he cried cheerily. "I hope you will forgive a change of plans. Lady Finistoun finds she must drive in to Kirkcoun to meet Major and Mrs. Menteith—Finistoun's sister, you know—so I offered myself and my dogcart to convey you to the Lodge. I hope you will forgive the change."

Mona was silent for an instant, while she took a rapid view of the situation. That she was annoyed at being caught in such a trap, need not be said. She did not, however, see any way out of it, and her first care was to hide any symptom of annoyance from the gay cavalier who stood awaiting her commands.

"Oh! I have nothing to forgive," she said, smiling. "If you do not mind taking me and my dress basket, I am ready to start."

"Well said," cried Lisle exultingly. "As it is a fine clear afternoon, and we have plenty of time, I will take you round by Balmuir; the views are splendid nearly all the way."

"Very well," said Mona, who had now recovered herself. Everyone is out except myself; but would you not like to put up your horse?"

"No, thanks! he is quite fresh. I have only come over from Kirkcoun, where, if I am not much mistaken, I saw Uncle Sandy and young Macalister struggling among a mob of wild-looking cattle," and he smiled significantly.

"Yes, they went to buy some of the creatures," returned Mona, with an answering smile.

"Shall we start?"

"Yes! I will leave a message, and be with you directly."

In a few minutes Mona was perched beside her charioteer, her light dress basket hoisted up and confided to the care of the groom—who sat behind—and they were off.

Lisle was a practised whip, his horse steady and powerful. The vehicle was easy, and Mona—leaning back and completely mistress of herself—enjoyed the air, the view, the motion; yes, and the easy talk, the carefully-veiled admiration of her companion, which formed a pleasant undertone.

"I hope there are not many very steep hills," she said, after a few moments' silence; "I am not too courageous."

"No, the road is safe and easy! I know the country; I was here for a whole season with Finistoun a few years ago, the autumn before you were presented. That is a sort of epoch to me."

"Much more so to me!" she returned, laughing. "I well remember the heart-sinking with which I looked forward to making my courtesy under the eye of royalty. Do you know I sometimes think all that must have been a dream."

"I fear the waking cannot have been very pleasant," said Lisle, sending his eyes upon her.

"I have nothing to complain of! There is not so much difference between one style of life and another, as a man like you would think."

"A man like me?" said Lisle. "What am I like?"

"Like your fellows, I suppose. Life to you and to your peers, without horses and dogs, shooting and hunting, clubs, races, and, for the more ambitious, politics, would be something intolerable. Now, a regular occupation, by which you earn your bread, and slowly but surely improve your position, answers all the purposes of these costly amusements; but I will not bore you by prosing—"

"Suppose I enjoy listening to the tones of your most sweet voice, will you not indulge me by a little more?"

"Oh, I have lost the thread of my discourse. I only want to say that now time has accustomed me to the loss of poor, dear granny, I think I am very happy."

"But there is one piece of your life about which I am profoundly interested, and would like to inquire into, if you would permit me."

"Yes; I do not mind telling you anything of that kind."

"There was a period after Mrs. Newburgh's death, when you had left the Everards', and had not yet disinterred your uncle. How did you get through that time?"

Mona laughed.

"A dear good soul took me in—a lady who had been my music mistress, and she showed me how to earn my living under her guidance. I attained to the proud eminence of earning about seven pounds a month. It was very nice, I assure you, to feel the money was my own."

"Great heavens!" ejaculated Lisle. "And you preferred this to marrying a man of wealth!"

"You must know how delicious the sense of independence is. Do you think a woman cannot feel it too?"

"And does love count for nothing?"

Mona laughed again.

"Yes, I suppose with the real upper class of human beings, it counts for a good deal. It is part of the sum, however, I have not yet worked out. Tell me something of your Indian life. You see I reciprocate the interest you take in my *history*."

"I do not think you reciprocate at all," returned Lisle, with a

wistful look, which she met steadily, a slightly mocking smile in her own.

Lisle's brow contracted ; but he had a good deal of tact and self-control, and he immediately started a light, amusing sketch of his life, so far as society, travelling, and hunting went, and time flew pleasantly.

What a well-bred, intelligent voice he had ! What an indescribable air of superiority and command. No, Mona was not surprised at her early weakness for her companion, but she did wonder that he seemed so ready to make love to her again. She was not at all aware that she was exceedingly attractive, nor that the fair promise of her early girlhood had been amply fulfilled, while the shy reserve which had partially shrouded the brightness of her understanding had ripened into a delightful soft tranquillity, suggesting the wealth of thought and feeling that slumbered beneath it.

She listened with evident interest to all he said, often questioning him, and so they drew near the end of their journey—of the *tete-a-tete* which Lisle had schemed to secure, and he had not moved her pleasant, friendly ease by one instant of hesitation or confusion. His most unmistakable insinuations, his most killing glances, only produced half-amused, half-kindly smiles.

Lisle was furious, mortified, and more in love than he ever was since his boyish days. Should he have to tell her in so many words that he adored her, and sought her for his wife, in order to extract any recognition from her ? If she were cold, if she shrank from him, or repelled him, he could understand it, and he would know how to act ; but this frank, charming kindness, this readiness to be with him ! It was an invisible, impassable fence which he did not seem capable of breaking down. "If I could but ascertain whether I have a rival or no," he thought, "I should know what to do. I suspect she is playing a part. What is her object ? To be Lady Lisle ? That would be object enough to most women ; but, though I have longed ceased to believe in angels, Mona is something different, or she never would have chosen poverty in preference to Waring. Well, I'll try what cool friendship will do, with a dash of flirting in other directions."

"There is the Lodge," he said, pointing to a long, low building, or collection of buildings, which lay in a hollow beneath them, the wild moorland round it, and some huge grey rocks behind. "The position is not comparable to Craigdarroch, and it must be cold and bleak enough in winter. But I suppose no one stays here in winter."

"I fancy my uncle will," said Mona, "and I cannot say I like the prospect. I shall try and get leave of absence for a few weeks, to pay a visit to Madame Debrisay."

"Who may she be ?"

"Do you not remember seeing a lady who used to teach me singing ?"

"I do remember!—a good-looking woman with dark eyes. I well remember stealing into the drawing-room at Green Street, and listening to you while you were quite unconscious. What a shy bird you were in those days!"

"I was indeed! How curious it seems to look back *now*! Well, that was the lady who took me in when the Everards turned me out—though I turned myself out."

"And where does she live?"

"In what you would consider inaccessible wilds, but—" as the sound of a rapidly-approaching carriage made her turn, and she interrupted herself to exclaim—"Here is Lady Finistoun and her visitors!"

They were alongside almost as she spoke.

"So glad I have overtaken you!" cried Lady Finistoun, saluting with her whip. "I wanted to be at home to receive you. Let us pass, Sir St. John."

Lisle drew to one side, and whipping up her ponies, Lady Finistoun dashed on at a rapid pace.

At the door were assembled Miss Morton, Bertie Everard, and Herr von Oetzen, one of the *attaches* to the German Embassy. The rest of the party were still in the forest, and Lord Finistoun had gone deer-stalking.

Lady Finistoun had alighted, and stood on the steps to welcome Mona, which she did very cordially, kissing her more than once, and presenting her to Mrs. Menteith as her "dear cousin."

"So," said Everard, advancing to shake hands with her, "you have been assigned to Lisle's care *ou revient toujours*, eh?"

"Oh, my mission is to take care of myself," returned Mona, smiling. "I did not know you had arrived."

"Came last night. Had I known that Uncle Sandy's lair was between this and Kirkcubright, I should have paid you a visit *en route*. Well, Mona, and have you recovered the Fitzgibbon episode? The poor fellow has had a desperate affair since. We have had to buy off the lady! How is my uncle? Are you the acknowledged heiress of Craigdarroch?"

"Alas, no! There is a cousin in the way. You must assist me to poison him."

"With pleasure. We will arrange the terms of the desperate deed after dinner."

"Come, Mona, the dressing-bell will ring in a few minutes. You shall have a cup of tea in your room."

The usual description of party was assembled to enjoy the pleasures of shooting, fishing, and deer-stalking in the forest, as it was called, of Strathairlie:—a few fine ladies masquerading by day in the simplest of tweed dresses and thickest of walking boots, and blazing out in the evening in fascinating toilettes, most ingeniously contrived to show off the best points of the wearers; a larger gather-

ing of men, who were out all day, and extremely tired at night, the greater number of whom were exceedingly bored by the presence of women, and moodily contrasted the wedded present with the glorious free bachelorhood of past shooting parties on the same ground.

Mona felt very grateful to Madame Debrisay for persuading her to have a black satin "demi-toilette," as she donned that garment. It was most becoming to the beautiful fairness of her neck and arms, yet she viewed herself with a slight sigh, as she thought of the quivering, exultant joy with which she used to go down to dinner at Harrowby Chase, to read an admiring verdict in Lisle's eyes, and listen to the words of tenderness he used to find so many unsuspecting opportunities of whispering. Then, she never doubted his entire devotion; now, she could hardly believe that anyone would sacrifice much for her. At anyrate she enjoyed unruffled peace, and, as a looker-on, would see more of the game than she ever saw before. At two or three-and-twenty, however, philosophy is but skin-deep, and life can never be enjoyable to the young without a personal interest.

The dinner was pleasant—even noisy, as most of the men were young and inclined to discuss their adventures eagerly. Mona was taken in by an honest-looking naval captain, who made himself very agreeable; and Lisle fell to the lot of a frisky widow, with whom he flirted gaily. Everard and Miss Morton quarrelled audibly.

The young heir was paraded, and his health drunk; and after dinner Lady Finistoun and her sister-in-law went up to look at him in his cot. Then Mona was reminded that she used to sing, and was sent to the piano, where she was surrounded by some of the gentle men as soon as they came in from dinner. The *attache* complimented her on her rendering of a *Folkslied*, and talked to her for a few moments in German.

Then Lisle, who had not been near her since they had arrived came close behind her, and said, in a low tone,—

"May I ask you for Tosti's 'Good-bye, Summer?' It is the last song I heard you sing."

"Was it?" said Mona. (How well she remembered that last happy evening at the Chase!) "I am afraid I can hardly manage it without the music, but I will try."

She succeeded in singing it sweetly and correctly, but she might have put more expression in it.

"Thank you," said Lisle shortly.

"I don't think you sing as well as you did. You used to give that in a much more melting style formerly!" cried Everard.

"Sorry I have deteriorated," said Mona, good-humouredly, as she took up her gloves, and left the piano.

The German *attache* sat down uninvited, and after rattling off brilliant *moreaux*, glided into an inspiring waltz.

After tapping her foot for a moment or two, Miss Morton boldly

invited one of the younger men, a boyish Northumbrian squire, to dance with her, and they were soon gyrating in the hall, the floor of which was polished oak, the open door permitting the music to be distinctly heard. Lady Finistoun followed with her brother-in-law, and Lisle, who had been talking with his host, ceased to speak, after listening for a few minutes, and crossing to the doorway where Mona was standing, said,—

“Shall we follow this wild example? I have scarcely danced since we waltzed together at the Chase. Will you trust yourself with me?”

“Yes,” returned Mona, in a low voice.

Something in its tone made Lisle look attentively at her; he saw, to his great surprise, that her large, dark liquid eyes were full of tears. What had affected her? He could not remember having heard the waltz before; was it associated with any special memory in Mona's mind, or with that possible “he” who may have filled the place he had voluntarily vacated? At anyrate he was conscious of a great longing to kiss away the tears,—to hold her in his arms,—to make her confess she had loved him once,—to promise she would love him again. She was not refrigerated and indifferent, she was as delightfully tender as ever. How charming a soft womanly woman was—a gentle impressionable woman!

No doubt, so long as the softness and impressionability does not bore my lord her master, or worry him with tears and woes when his own tenderness flows away from her into new channels.

So Lisle put his arm round her, holding her to him more closely than was absolutely necessary, and they swung round in time to the music. Mona, however, soon declared that it was so long since she had danced, that she felt tired and giddy almost immediately, and disengaging herself from her partner, sat down beside Mrs. Menteith, a plain, pleasant-mannered woman, with a degree of military decision in her tone. She had married a light dragoon of moderate means, and had never regretted it.

Lisle stood by her for some time watching for an opportunity to talk to her unheard by others, but none offered.

In truth, the waltz was one that brought back to Mona painfully sweet and sad memories. It was associated in her mind with a certain evening when it had first dawned upon her that Lisle, of whom she stood a little in awe, sought her with a lover's warmth and tenderness. From that moment all the romance of her nature clung round not *him*, but the golden image of him which her fancy had set up! He was still, exteriorly, her idea, and she could have wept over the destruction of her lovely dream. Beyond this, the music recalled her kind tyrannical grannie, the sad scenes which preceded her death, above all, Leslie Waring, and all the pain she had inflicted on him. His face came back to her as it looked when they parted—the boyish, plump, good-humoured countenance, made manly and

dignified by suffering gallantly borne ; and he had no mother or sister to comfort or support him ! Like most warm-hearted girls, Mona had a great idea that every woman should be " Our Lady of Consolation " to her kinsfolk and acquaintance.

It was the thought of Waring more than anything else that brought the tears to her eyes. How little Lisle could have followed the interweaving of her thoughts. Yet she knew he had felt to a certain degree with her from the instant he had put his arm round her. Yet it was with a kind of tender regret that she felt she could never trust him again. To Mona the absence of trust implied the death of love.

" If you can spare Sir St. John ! " cried Miss Morton, suddenly standing before her, " I have suffered enough at the hands and feet of an incompetent partner, and I want a few really good turns before that delightful waltz stops."

" My dear Miss Morton, it is nearly four years since I bounded on the light fantastic toe," said Lisle coolly, " and I am not, Miss Craig will tell you, equal to conduct you through the mazy dance. I am going to have a cigar in the garden," and he strolled away.

" I really think Captain—I mean Sir St. John Lisle, can be frightfully rude ! He was always one of the most conceited and heartless of men ! You remember that affair of Lady Marchmont ; he really threw her over scandalously ! "

" I think Lady Marchmont was quite capable of taking care of herself. Lisle is just an ordinary man of the world—a little above the average in intelligence," said Mrs. Menteith.

" Well, I would not have any young person put much trust in him," returned Miss Morton significantly. " You ought to have brought over that handsome cousin of yours, Miss Craig. He might have taught us some reel steps. I want very much to learn the Highland Fling."

" I never saw Kenneth dance," said Mona.

" Kenneth ! What a charming name. He has the most superb figure in the Highland costume you can imagine, Mrs. Menteith. A young Roderick Dhu. I really have quite a *schwarmerei* for him. Are you not in love with him, my dear Miss Craig ? Living in the same house day after day, I don't see how it is to be avoided."

Mona laughed, and said Kenneth was very handsome. Then Miss Morton declared her intention of going over to Craigdarroch for the express purpose of improving her acquaintance with the " braw John Hielandman."

Later, and shortly before the party broke up for the night, Lisle strolled up to where Mona was standing with Lord Finistoun, who moved away to ask his wife some question about to-morrow.

" There is such a splendid moon," he said ; " I think you would be delighted with the effect of the silvery light streaming o'er moor and mountain. A walk down to the river would be charming."

"I wish I could go!" exclaimed Mona frankly.

"Do come!" he cried. "You would not be missed for half-an-hour."

"No, no! I shall," as my uncle says, "gang awa' to my bed, and have a peep at the beauty you describe from my window."

"It is a moon worthy of the warmest lovers!" exclaimed Lisle, in a tone of regret.

"Is the moon worthy of warm lovers?" said Mona, glancing at him with an arch smile; "because it is, as astronomers tell us, a region of extinct volcanoes—of exhausted fires."

Lisle looked at her sharply, and his brows contracted.

"What matter," he said, "if they were heavenly while they lasted."

"Ah! fire does not belong to heaven—rather to the other place. Good-night."

"Mona!" he exclaimed, in a low tone.

"Good-night," she repeated. "Good-night, Sir St. John Lisle."

CHAPTER XXI.

DIVERS OPINIONS.

ALTHOUGH Mona yielded to Lady Finistoun's earnest request, and remained over the following day, she was really anxious to return home. This passing contact with the social strata from which she had been divorced, showed her how deep was the gulf that yawned between her present and her past. She could not return to Lady Finistoun's set, neither would they that belonged to it pass from her mind; she had thrown in her lot with Uncle Sandy, and with Uncle Sandy she must abide.

Mona had not the faintest tinge of snobbishness, but she was really fond of Lady Finistoun, and the easy, pleasant manners, the sense of enjoyment of those who surrounded her, made a delightful hole, on which she was reluctant to turn her back. She was, however, philosophic enough to do so with a good grace, accepting the inevitable without a murmur.

During the day and evening which succeeded that last recorded, Lisle had no chance of speaking to Mona except before witnesses—and he grew very ill-tempered as time went on. Most of the ladies went out to lunch with the sportsmen at a distant point, but Mona remained with Mrs. Menteith, and took a ramble with her, the girl, and his nurse, in the lazy, sunny afternoon.

At dinner Miss Morton cleverly captured Lisle, whose face, under the infliction, was a source of amusement to Mona whenever she looked at him. There was no attempt at dancing—the German

attache sang some duets with Mona, and Miss Morton, who had a shrill, clear voice—trained to perform extraordinary gymnastics—treated the company to some French comic songs—a performance which so disgusted Lisle, that, with an expressive glance at Mona, he disappeared and was seen no more.

The next morning was grey and soft, and Lisle, with Lord Finistoun, started early to stalk deer. Lisle was in a very bad temper. He was enraged at the smiling ease with which Mona kept him at bay, and mortified at being held in check by the fair woman who so comparatively short a time before had changed colour when he spoke to her—whose hand trembled when he took it in his own. Moreover he was furious with himself for having lost the reins of his self-control, and fallen so much deeper in love than he had been. After all, he would get over it again—only he must not see her, or he would not answer for himself.

Lady Finistoun expected more guests and was unable to accompany Mona on her return home. Miss Morton offered to drive her back to Craigdarroch in the pony carriage, and some time after luncheon they started. Lady Finistoun parted with Mona most effusively, and insisted on her giving a promise to come again; but while neither granting nor withholding it, Mona guessed that in the rush of new pleasures and new people she would probably be forgotten.

Various important nothings had delayed their setting out, and it was nearly teatime when Miss Morton drew up the ponies at Mr. Craig's door.

The old gentleman had evidently been asleep over a volume of "Metapheesics," which he frequently took up after dinner.

"Here I am, uncle, back again on your hands," said Mona, going into the library.

"Aweel, I am glad to see your face!" said Uncle Sandy cheerfully, "though you did outstay your leave. Eh, you are looking bonnie! You'll be finding it dull and hamely here after yon grand hoose, and a' the fine doings."

"I am very glad to come home, I assure you."

"That's right; it's kindly said."

"Miss Morton is in the drawing-room, uncle—may I ask her to tea?"

"Ay, to be sure. Is Lady Finistoun no with you? She is a bonnie bird!"

Mona explained, and ended by ringing and ordering tea to be prepared forthwith.

"I'm glad to see you, mem," said Uncle Sandy, shuffling into the drawing-room with the help of his stick, and holding out his hand to Miss Morton, who rose up tall, thin, and somewhat masculine-looking, to greet him. "You'll stay and tak' a bite and a cup o' tea." Here he tumbled into a chair. "There has been a touch of east in the wind yesterday and to-day, and my back and limbs have

been just aching fearfu'. You'll feel it far keener ower in Strath-airlie—we are weel sheltered here."

"Oh, it is a wretched climate everywhere," returned Miss Morton, with decision. "In another month I suppose all civilized people must quit these latitudes."

"Ceevilised!" repeated Uncle Sandy, in a sharp key. "Why, Scotland is the most *ceevilised* country upon earth!"

"Oh, indeed? I never heard that before," said Miss Morton, removing her hat and resettling the feather.

"Then it is time you did! Whaur will ye find a people so well educated, and so intelligent? Whaur will ye find so much thrift, so little crime, such a God-fearin' self-respectin' population—"

"So extensive a consumption of whisky, and so large an *illegitimate* birth-rate!" interrupted Miss Morton with strong emphasis.

Uncle Sandy gasped. That a woman—a young woman, or a woman who posed as young—a spinster, a fine lady, should have unhesitatingly uttered such a word—absolutely stunned him.

"Aweel, aweel, that's easy said. 'Gie a dog a bad name.' A' that is no proven," he returned feebly; for he knew little of statistics, nor was he much given to believe what he did not like.

"I don't know if you ever read the graver magazines," said Miss Morton, with an intolerable air of superiority, "so perhaps you have not seen Professor Macgrubber's paper on the comparative morality of the Celtic races. He brings out some curious facts."

"Facts!" Are ye sure they *are* facts? I would nae be so keen to believe what a mon says against his ain country—(I suppose by his name he's Scotch?)—'it's an ill bird that fouls its ain nest.'"

"Oh! he is a perfectly reliable scientific man, and he says the *illegitimate*—"

"It's no becoming to argue such a like subject wi' a young leddy," interrupted Uncle Sandy, hastily and severely. "At ony rate we are *ceevilised* enough to ken that."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Miss Morton, with some contempt. "It is evident that you are more moral in talk than in action!"

Before Mr. Craig could gather his forces to reply, Mona came to the rescue.

"I am sure tea must be ready. Shall we go into the dining-room? I am quite longing for a cup."

"So am I. It is past my usual teatime," cried Miss Morton. "What a lovely view you have here. I have rarely seen anything more beautiful, and I have knocked about a good deal."

"I am surprised ye find any good in the country at a'," remarked Uncle Sandy, with withering sarcasm as he took his seat.

"The country, the rocks and mountains, and burns and sea, are well enough. In short, all save the spirit of man *and* the climate are divine," remarked Miss Morton, with cheerful disregard of what anyone else thought.

This was so very evident, that Uncle Sandy instinctively felt he had better leave her alone.

"Mona and me we have wandered a bit oursel's," he resumed, to change the subject. "It's varra divertin' to see the differences betwixt diverse nations."

"It used to be," corrected Miss Morton; "but they are all growing horribly alike. When I was last at Jerusalem," she continued, helping herself to a cream scone, while Uncle Sandy's eyes looked big with amazement, as seen over a huge cup of tea he had just lifted to his lips—"When I was last at Jerusalem, a very enterprising German was just going to start a threepenny 'bus from the Temple to Tophet—convenient, but vulgar."

It is much to the credit of Uncle Sandy's national caution and self-control that he swallowed his tea in silence, and even helped himself to a spoonful of marmalade, before he replied dryly in the interrogative form,—

"And how many times might you have been in the Holy City?"

"Twice. First when I joined Lord and Lady Huntover's party, and I was awfully bored. That determined me to travel on my own hook ever after; and then the year before last, when I went down the Danube and by the Black Sea to Constantinople, and so on by Smyrna and Damascus to Jerusalem, I only took my maid and a dragoman from Smyrna. I enjoyed *that* tour. I met some very good-looking American naval officers; they were shrewd and amusing. *Apropos*, where is your nephew, Mr. Craig?"

"He is awa' to the loch wi' Mary Black to fish. He never does much, though, wi' the rod. Hielanders have no patience—they want to be aye bang banging at birds. I doubt but Kenneth will have taken the nets. They will be here soon. The girlie canna want her tea."

"I like to hear you talk, Mr. Craig," said Miss Morton, sending in her cup for replenishing. "I fancy your Scotch is pure and unadulterated."

"My English, you mean," he said angrily. "It is weel known that the Scotch speak better and more grammatical English than the English themselves."

"I am learning a good deal today," said Miss Morton coolly.

Mona hastened to turn the subject.

"I have always had a great wish to see Damascus," she said. "Is it very beautiful?"

"Yes, very lovely. The most picturesque place. It is completely encircled by hills. The site is something like—oh, like a frying-pan! The city with its gardens and abundant trees, lies at the bottom, and a straight white road sloping up slightly looks like the handle, and leads to Beyrout."

"Here comes your nephew, Mr. Craig, and the young lady," cried Miss Morton, interrupting herself—her seat was opposite one of the

windows. "There is another gentleman with them. I seem to know him. Why, it is Bertie Everard, and he has a rod in his hand. I thought he had gone with the deer-stalkers. Now he will expect me to drive him back. What a bore."

In a few minutes Miss Black came in, blushing brightly from pleasure at seeing Mona, as well as from habitual shyness. She came straight to her, and kissed her with quiet cordiality. Kenneth, too, had no eyes for anyone but Mona, until he had greeted her.

Then Miss Morton called out,—

"How goes it, Mr. Macalister; come here and sit by me. What a provoking creature you are to be out, when I have taken the trouble to drive over here."

Kenneth coloured crimson, and explained to her and to his uncle that he was not fit to sit down to table, after dragging a net, until he had changed his clothes. Then he made his escape.

Everard went up to Mr. Craig.

"Very glad to see you, sir," he said, with unusual civility. "I have been coming to call on you two or three times. Now I have made my way here at rather an unsuitable time, which I hope you'll excuse."

"Sit ye doon, sit ye doon!" cried Uncle Sandy. "All times are suitable—especially when food is ready. Bring mair cups and cookies. We are nae denuded, though the housewife has been awa'."

For some occult reason, Everard was rather a favourite with Uncle Sandy.

"I thought you had gone with the deerstalkers," said Mona.

"I intended going, but Lisle was in such a beastly bad temper I thought I wouldn't venture. We would have been sure to quarrel. This place looks uncommonly well—ever so much better than when Fitzallan had it. That's partly your doing, eh, Mona? Thank you," as she handed him his tea. "I must say women can be of use in making the inside of a house bearable, if in nothing else."

"I believe men would do it better if they put their minds to it," said Miss Morton.

"You ought not to say so, even if you think it," returned Everard. "It isn't good form for a woman to run down women."

"But I don't run them down!" cried Miss Morton. Then interrupting herself, as Mary was about to take the seat beside her—"No, no! this is Mr. Macalister's place."

Poor Mary fled to Mona's side of the table.

"Come by me, my dearie," said Uncle Sandy, "hurstling" nearer the end of the table to make room for her.

"Why, you never do anything else," Everard continued, speaking to Miss Morton. "You bully all the women up at the Lodge to no end."

"Why do they let me, then? They are so weak, I cannot help it."

"The Apostle says—" began Uncle Sandy with some solemnity, intending to convey a dignified rebuke, and to say a word in season.

"Which Apostle?" asked Everard quickly, "The Apostle Paul was a man of the world. He might have an idea or two on the extremely complicated question of female character, but the rest are nowhere on such a subject."

Uncle Sandy retreated in tolerable order on the scones, but made no further sallies.

"You are really the most contradictory creature I ever met, Bertie!" exclaimed Miss Morton. "You are always railing at women yourself, but if I say a word against them, you are up in arms."

"In arms! Whose arms? Yours? I am afraid you would give me more of a bear's hug than a loving squeeze."

"Well!" cried Kenneth, hastily swallowing a lump of short-bread, and reddening vehemently with the effort, as also at the sound of his own voice, "I say that no man is good for much who thinks the world would be worth living in were it not for the ladies."

"Bravo, Kenneth!" said Mona, while Mary clapped her hands, and Uncle Sandy again essayed to express his views.

"The mon wha has na a kindly thocht for the mither that watched ower him an'—"

"Oh! mothers don't count in Mr. Everard's world," interrupted Miss Morton. "He is so devoid of human feeling, that he must have been hatched by some patent incubator, like the funny little fluffy chickens one sees in that window in Regent Street."

"Thank you," said Everard. "I am largely in your debt."

"And so you believe in women," said Miss Morton, turning to Kenneth, who had returned, clothed in his very best kilt and plaid. "What a nice boy you are! If you are going to live here all your life, it is as well to have something to comfort you."

"I have a great deal to comfort me."

"That's fortunate! Now, as you know the country, I want you to take me to some good places for making sketches—picturesque nooks, you know, not wide expanses of country."

"Oh! I am afraid I'm no great judge," etc., etc.

While Miss Morton was exercising her blandishments on Kenneth, Everard was making himself agreeable to Uncle Sandy. He had a business faculty, which told upon his conversation with a kindred spirit, and the keen old Scotchman was interested in his remarks.

"Those fields of yours, between this and the loch, look considerably better and cleaner than they did last year; and I see you have a capital lot of cattle on the pasture."

"Ay," said Uncle Sandy, much gratified. "You see, the last twa years I was awa' seeking health and finding nane. Noo things

"better under the maister's een, forbye Kenneth's, and he is a
"ar chiel aboot cattle and the like."

"but, uncle, I am sure you are better than when I first saw you,"
Mona.

"Oh, ay! I do not say that I am no better, but it is varra little.
"aters in yon place did me good—I don't deny it; but I am
"puir body after all."

"When are you going to let Mona come back to us?" asked
"rd.

"to I when she likes, when she likes!"

"I am not going from home again, thank you," said Mona. "I
"nceited enough to think that I am of more use here than any-
"else."

"and so you are, my lassie, so you are."

"Why we will all be inconsolable, and Lisle will be tearing his

"Come, Miss Morton, if you have done deluding that son of
"ountains, it is time to drive me back to the Lodge."

"Why, are you not going to walk?"

"Not if I can help it."

"Then I suppose we must go," to Kenneth. "You will be sure

"I me what day it will suit you to guide me to this cleugh at
"uir. Good-evening, Mr. Craig, I wish you would let your

"teach Lady Finistoun's how to make those cream scones. If I
"nd that article of Macgrubber's, I'll send it to you. It will en-
"en you a good deal."

"You need not fash yourself," stiffly. "It's a kind of enlighten-
"I dinna want."

"That is sinning against light, Mr. Craig. Good-evening."

"You are really managing the old naiser very well, Mona," said

"ard, in a low tone, as Mona went to the door to see her guests
" "You are gathering sense. I always thought you less of a
"than most women."

"Mona thanked him demurely.

"Kenneth was very attentive in arranging Miss Morton's wraps,
"she was flatteringly coquettish. Mary could hardly hide her

"hter; then Everard jumped in, and they were off.

"That's a varra remarkable woman," said Uncle Sandy, when
"y all reassembled in the library, where a wood fire was crack-

" "But I canna say that she seems to me a wiselike ane.
"ore's jus naething she will na put her tongue to; neither is there

"thing that is respeckit by her. She is aye interrupting an'
"sidering aulder and wiser folk than hersel'. She has wandered to

"l fro, and seen a walth of places; but it has no improved her in-
"igence, for, when a's said an' dune, she is just a haverin' faupy!"

"Eh, Mr. Craig, but you are cruel to speak so of a leddy that
"Kenneth is so pleased with, and who is so taken up with him," said
"Mary, with a pretty, saucy smile.

"I wish to hear nae mair about her," said Uncle Sandy, drawing an arm-chair near the fire, and tumbling into it, while his stick, catching under the fire-irons, upheaved them with a huge clang. "If you stay here, just bide still, for I want a little sleep to make up for what that stormy woman broke in upon, and if ye canna, just gang in the other room."

The young people readily took the hint, and in the drawing-room held high council.

The topic under discussion was Mary's return home. She thought she had been away long enough. But Mona strongly urged her remaining.

"You are rapidly becoming a prime favourite with my uncle, and you must rivet your chains before we venture to broach the question of your marriage. Let me write to your mother, begging an extension of leave."

This advice prevailed, Mary adding to her consent with a soft sigh—

"I am just too happy here."

The fine weather which had prevailed for some weeks now broke up, and October presented itself in gloomy guise, with wild winds and driving rain, which permitted but little out-door exercise to the girls.

Nothing kept Kenneth at home. He came in to his meals, damp and glowing from the exhilarating struggle with wind and weather, and beaming with the hope and happiness which grew more and more as he perceived his beloved Mary was creeping into his uncle's heart.

Uncle Sandy himself was a little complaining and cranky; but, on the whole, music and reading, the state of the stocks, and book-keeping, with Kenneth's help, kept them tolerably amused during this period of imprisonment.

Lisle made no sign. Mona was not sorry. His presence, without having a distinctly disturbing effect, awoke painful memories, and obliged her constantly to think before she spoke.

At length a fairly bright morning broke upon the deluged country, and Mona undertook to drive into Kirkcubright to execute divers commissions.

Uncle Sandy objecting to be left alone, Mona departed with only "the boy" in attendance.

Having finished her business, she turned the horse's head homewards, and had alighted to walk up the steep road which led from the loch to Craigdarroch, when a sportsman, with dog and gun, suddenly emerged from a small wood which filled a sheltered hollow, and approached her. She recognised Lisle, and paused to speak to him.

"It is more than a fortnight since I saw you!" he exclaimed, in an aggrieved tone, while his keen light eyes sparkled with the joy of seeing her, and his hard mouth relaxed into a pleasanter smile.

"I suppose it is," returned Mona, smiling.

"It is a delightful day for walking. Will you not tell your servant to take the trap home, and let me have the pleasure of escorting you by the short way to the house? I have a message for you from Lady Finistoun, and was on my way to deliver it."

Mona thought for a moment, and then said—"I will."

Directing the boy to go on, she walked on beside Lisle, and they turned off almost immediately by a path to the left, that led by a steeper and more direct line to the house.

"And what was Lady Finistoun's message?" she asked, as Lisle did not break silence immediately.

"Oh! she finds the extreme damp prejudicial to the darling baby, so she suddenly determined to start for their own place in Cumberland. Most of the party went with her. Finistoun and Everard remain for ten days or so longer. Lady Finistoun begged me to say how deeply she regretted not seeing you again, and that she would write as soon as she had reached Melton Court."

"When did she leave?"

"Yesterday morning. They drove as far as Loanhead, and took the train to Perth there."

"I am so sorry I did not see Evelyn again. I am really very fond of her."

"Oh! you will no doubt meet in the winter. I suppose you will escape from these solitudes sometimes."

"I do not think it likely I shall."

"You are not bound here for the term of your natural life!" cried Lisle, drawing closer to her, and looking eagerly into her eyes. "That unspeakable bore, Miss Morton, mentioned some absurd report of your uncle intending to marry you to his wild Highlander of a nephew. It cannot be true!"

"Why?" asked Mona demurely.

"Why? A creature like *that*?"

"He is very good-looking, and most amiable in disposition!"

"But one knows how an amiable disposition may fare at your hands," he returned somewhat bitterly. "Tell me, for God's sake, is it possible you can contemplate such a sacrifice? Do you really think of linking yourself with a mere respectable farmer?"

"Pray remember, if you please, that Kenneth Macalister is my near kinsman; he cannot be socially beneath me."

"I daresay you think me an ill-bred brute, but you know how profoundly interested I have always been in you, and once in a crisis in your fate, you permitted me to advise you—"

"I do not think you waited for permission!" said Mona, with an arch smile.

"I think I never made such a mistake in my life ! I am always burning to implore your forgiveness for my idiotic suggestion."

"What is there to forgive?" she returned gently. "On the contrary, I ought to be grateful to you for breaking through the principle of non-intervention, which, of course, would have prevented a man of the world doing anything so Quixotic as to offer a way of escape to a damsel in distress."

"May I tell you what my own state of mind was at that unhappy juncture?"

"No, no ! There is no use in looking back ! Let us thank Heaven for the present."

"I do not," said Lisle gloomily. "But do not be enigmatic. You are not going to marry this—this cousin of yours?"

"No, Sir St John ;" returned Mona, assuming an air of sadness. "I cannot, seeing that he has rejected me."

"What !" cried Lisle ; "rejected you?"

"Yes ! I hope you sympathize with me in the shock I have received ? But Kenneth prefers *not* to marry me."

"Then old Craig wanted to arrange a marriage?"

"He did ; but his purpose has been frustrated !" returned Mona with tragic emphasis.

Lisle laughed.

"I understand, I think," he said. "Imagine any man refusing you ! I did not think you had so much quiet sarcasm?"

"I am unaware of it," returned Mona.

"And you will not listen to my explanation?"

"I do not see what you have to explain ! and, were any explanation necessary, there is no time ; we are close to the house, and suppose you will come in and see Uncle Sandy?"

"Most certainly. But, Miss Craig, I must insist—I mean, must implore you to hear the explanation I wish to make."

"I really want none !—perhaps I understand more than you think."

"I fear you may understand in a wrong way."

"Well, here we are at the house, and here comes Uncle Sandy and Mary. If, in a paroxysm of hospitality, my uncle asks you to supper, do not stay. I know the *menu*, and you would not like it."

Then hastening to meet them, she exclaimed—

"I have brought you each a letter, but there is none for me from Madame Debrisay. I fear something must be the matter with her."



CHAPTER XXII.

THE BIRD IS FLOWN.

had never before been so piqued and frustrated as he was at Mona's mode of receiving his advances.

Her shown coldness or resentment, he could have understood. But her sweet friendliness was utterly baffling.

His impatience, the eager fire that quickened his pulses, urged him perpetually to seek her; while pride, and his habitual reluctance to commit himself, held him back.

It was a running fight between these two forces, through the next few weeks which succeeded Mona's visit to Strathairlie; but at last the most patient finally prevailed, and telling himself he really ought to go at once to the boor at Craigdarroch, he started in wonderfully good spirits for his first day's sport, intending to end the day in Mona's society. It was a special stroke of luck, he thought, to have a *tete-a-tete* walk with her; but when he reviewed their conversation in the evening, he found his friend and partner slumbered, he was obliged to confess he had made very little way.

—or did she not resent his throwing her over, as he usually had, when her grandmother came to grief?

As so young and inexperienced at the time that she could not realize the impossibility of a man like himself risking marriage with a richly-dowered girl—a more enlightened, a more sensible woman, would have seen and understood the difficulty, nor been less for being ready to give her up to a richer rival. He was awfully selfish and unreasonable! Now that Mona had been so long of life—the seamy side of it too—she ought to appreciate the lives which actuated him; perhaps she did, for she never rebuked him, or said sharp things, only she was so infernally calm! It was quite possible she might have fallen in love with him, else in the interim. Who could it be?—some brute of a man?

He felt savagely jealous, as though his sacred rights had been invaded. He would do, or sacrifice anything to call the conscious Mona to her cheek—to win a confession of love from her lips, even at the price of himself to the fetters of matrimony. Now that he was richer than people generally knew—it was possible to be the worst of all ills of indissoluble union. Of course the connection was most objectionable, but nowadays that mattered little. It was always a social success. All society asked was to be amused and amused. Who provides the soothing and amusements very little.

The old "peasant proprietor," her uncle, did not matter. Lisle was not the man to allow anyone he objected to to cross him. And if Mona loved him (which, if he once surrendered, and asked her to marry him, she would, warmly, deliciously), she would yield to him in everything. The thing was really worth risking. Life with Mona would be very charming for a year or so. So Lisle reasoned, as he thought, coolly; but, in truth, the tide of passion was rapidly rising to that height which demands gratification at any price.

Having made up his mind more thoroughly than he was perhaps aware, Lisle found shooting, and even deer-stalking, a less satisfying amusement than it used to be, and two or three days after his chance encounter with Mona, he started for Craigdarroch, determined to begin the siege in earnest.

It was a crisp, clear afternoon, and seldom had "his bosom's lord" sat so lightly on its throne." Of his success he never doubted. The only question that he debated mentally, was how soon it would be in good taste to declare himself. They were not strangers. She must know that he had been a good deal smitten with her nearly four years ago. It was only taking up the dropped stitches in the web of their lives. He would be guided by circumstances.

"Is Mr. Craig at home, and the young ladies?" he demanded of the little maid who came when he rang.

"The maister's in, but—" she was beginning, when Mr. Craig himself appeared, with his inevitable stick, at the library door.

"Eh, come your ways!" he cried. "I saw ye as ye walked up the drive. I'm glad to see you. I'm here alane: they're a' oot."

"Indeed!" said Lisle, following him into the library, intending to give the old man a few minutes, to find out where Mona had gone, and to follow her. "What has become of your nieces?"

"Mary Black is no niece of mine. She is a nice-like girlie, but I have no kin except Mona and Kenneth. Well, they are awa' to set Mona on her road."

"On her road? Where?" asked Lisle.

"To Glasga'. She'll get there this evening, in time to catch the London night express."

"London!" repeated Lisle, in angry surprise. "Has she gone to London?"

"Yes. She had a letter frae Madame—maybe you'll mind Madame Debrisay, the leddy wha took my niece in when you grand folks turned her oot. Weel, the letter wasna frae hersel'. It was the landlady—an honest-like woman—wha wrote, at madame's order, to explain why *she* could not write. She was varra sick with bronchitis, and the landlady she added that she was frightened hersel', for she was that bad the doctor wanted her to have a nurse. With that, nothing would keep Mona; she must go to nurse her. I was angered against her, for I didna think it right for her to go off in a jiffy frae me, wha is as a father to her, and maintains her."

"But she went?" ejaculated Lisle.

"Ay, she did that. She put her arms round my neck, and she says, wi' her bonnie een full o' tears—'Don't seek to stop me, uncle. *She* was good to me before I knew you; and don't you think,' she says, 'if *you* were ill, I'd come awa' frae everyone to nurse you?' an' I felt she spoke true—she would stick to me, so I just said—'I'll no pay for your whim-whams,' and she says, 'No, uncle! I have money enough for the journey. Just let me go with your goodwill,' an' I said—'Go, then, my lassie,' and she's gane."

"Good heavens!" cried Lisle. "Alone; to go through the worry and annoyance of changing—of—"

"What's to harm her? She is nae a bairn," interrupted Uncle Sandy. "We live in a ceevilized country."

Lisle was silent with vexation. Had he but known, he might have escorted her to Glasgow, if not to London; and what a different journey it would have been from the last they had taken together. He was certainly out of luck.

"Still, I am surprised you did not send young Macalister with her!" exclaimed Lisle, when he had mastered his impulse to swear audibly and energetically at the self-satisfied, miserly old scarecrow that had let his charming niece—the temporary idol and future wife of Sir St. John Lisle—go off alone, to struggle with porters and passengers like a poor servant girl going to a new place.

"What for should Kenneth waste his time when I wanted him here, forbye the siller it would cost there and back? Young people have nae consideration—an' yet *you're* no a lad any longer, Sir St. John!"

"The greenness of my youth has certainly departed. But I am greatly annoyed about this sudden journey. I have nothing on earth to do! If I had had an idea Miss Craig was going alone, I should certainly with your permission, have escorted her to Glasgow, and seen her off to London."

"Eh, ye needna fash yoursel' about *my* permission! Mona is varra headstrong in some ways. She does not bend hersel' to my wull as she ought—considering I am willing to provide for her; and she has crossed me in a matter I had set my mind on. Still, she's a guid an' a kind lassie. There's just one thing we canna agree on."

"And what may that be?" asked Lisle, to keep the old man going, while he pondered what step he should take to recover his lost quarry.

"She is just awfu' set against my neyfew Kenneth—a guid lad-die, and a braw young mon—and I should like to see my bit land an' gowd go to baith, but she's aye resolved not."

"But my dear sir, you do not suppose that a girl like Mona—I mean your niece—could marry a mere young"—ploughman, he was going to say, but he changed it to the word "countryman. It would be too incongruous."

"He is no that countrified! He was for twa years in the city of London in an office."

"Oh, of course; that makes a vast difference," said Lisle gravely. "Where does this Madame Debrisay live?"

"In a varra nice part—Westbourne Villas, nigh the Royal Oak station. You'll ken it, I'm thinking."

"I cannot say I do," returned Lisle, while he thought, "Old blockhead! Why did he not give me the number?"

"There are varra fine hooses about there, awd plenty omnibuses to a' pairts."

"Very convenient, I'm sure! What is Madame Debrisay's number? Lady Finistoun will want to know Miss Craig's address."

"Eh! but she knows it weel. She has been there hersel'."

"Obstinate old idiot!" thought Lisle; "he will not tell." "Oh, indeed!" he said aloud, "You must miss your niece very much."

"I will do so! Sma' doot o't. She is a remarkable, wise-like, douce lassie—only a wee self-opeenionated! It's amazing, that being so lang among a lot o' fule-folk, she kept her senses so weel."

By this time Lisle had gathered himself together, and said,—

"I ought to apologise for speaking so warmly, but I always take a lively interest in Miss Craig."

"Sae it would seem," returned Uncle Sandy, with a chuckle, which struck Lisle as peculiar.

Did the old duffer presume to form any surmises as to the source of that interest? Lisle thought he had talked to him quite long enough.

"I brought you the last communication from the factor of Balmuir," he said. "You see he has caved in, and you may consider the question settled."

"Oh, that's weel, varra weel," putting on his glasses.

"And I must say good morning. Can I do anthing for you at Kirkcoun? I am going back there."

"No, I thank ye. Kenneth will bring back a' that is wanted."

"Good-bye then. I hope you will hear to-morrow of Miss Craig's safe arrival."

Lisle strode away in an intense ill-humour. Mona was altogether inexplicable. At the shortest notice she was ready to put miles between herself and the man that she must know was ready to throw himself at her feet! And all to nurse a broken-down music mistress. Yet there was something in her generous readiness to help a friend that appealed to his better nature. Whatever she was, she had a sound heart! True, this woman might have some hold over her! He rejected the low suspicion. After all it would be well to have such a girl by his side to comfort and sustain him in the inevitable dark hours which come even to the wealthiest and most prosperous. Lisle would not have given much thought to this *de of the* question had not the character he was considering

elonged to a young and charming woman who had for the moment escaped him. Still, to the most selfish come, in occasional glimpses, the perception of what is good and true. Craftiness, and cold, worldly wisdom are useful within certain limits, but once caught in the tangled brake of doubt, difficulty, sorrow, suffering, there love and truth are the only guides.

Some such ideas, considerably modified, were floating through Lisle's brain, when he heard the "flop, flop" of Mr. Craig's heavy-botomed steed, and soon the ramshackle phaeton and ridiculously disproportioned horse came around a bend in the road. In the vehicle were seated Miss Black whose eyes looked suspiciously red, and Kenneth, who held the reins. He pulled up as Lisle waved his hands.

"So Miss Craig has deserted you," he said.

"She has indeed," returned Kenneth. "It is a bad business—poor Madame Debrisay being so ill. I never knew her to be ill before."

"And I am sure Mona had a sad heart," said Miss Black. "She looked so pale and downcast. It will be a long, weary road for her to travel all alone."

"She telegraphed first thing to say she was coming," added Kenneth.

"What's her address?" asked Lisle. "I must let Lady Finissoon know."

"It's 9 Westbourne Villas—away near the Royal Oak," said Kenneth.

"Thank you," returned Lisle, making a mental note of it.

A few more words and they parted, going in opposite directions.

"Queer people," mused Lisle, as he walked rapidly down hill. "But I suppose they enjoy themselves as we do and are probably less often bored. Anyhow, it must be a relief to get away from such surroundings—my sweet Mona. I am a most unlucky dog to have missed the chance of a long journey with you. I might have had with judicious management, the privilege of kissing away your tears, if you shed any, and generally comforting you. Shall I follow? I must think."

The shock was great to Mona when she read of her good friend's illness. Hitherto Madame Debrisay had been invariably well, and her idea of her being alone and helpless, in a mere lodging was intolerable.

Mona immediately determined to go to her, and, as Uncle Sandy rightly surmised, nothing would have held her back; no fear of being disinherited would have prevented her as Uncle Sandy said, from "ganging her ain gate."

Her quick imagination depicted matters as considerably worse

than she ultimately found them, and her solitary journey south, through the long darkness of a mid-October night, was passed in brief snatches of sleep and prolonged fits of thought. Reviewing her relations to Madame Debrisay and her Uncle—the only two real friends she possessed—she felt how much nearer and dearer the former was. In her she had a friend, not only attached, nay devoted, capable of understanding and sympathising with her to an unusual degree. To Uncle Sandy she felt bound, not by gratitude only, but by the almost indissoluble bond which holds a generous soul to the being who depends upon it. Having known her, he would be utterly desolate without her; but real companionship did not exist between them. Monafelt she could not spend her whole life with Uncle Sandy, neither could she desert him. She half hoped that Mary Black would in time fill her place. Respecting her own future, she neither hoped nor feared much. Her meeting with Lisle had saddened her a good deal. She felt the old charm of his style and manner, but her heart could never go out to him again. Neither could the highest worth, she thought, atone for the want of that indescribable grace and refinement which only the force of habit and association from childhood can produce. Still life was rich enough to possess plenty of interest and enjoyment, beside the supreme delight of loving and being loved, by some man who could satisfy both mind and fancy; and, for the present, she only asked to be of use to dear Madame Debrisay.

It was a cold raw morning, thick and foggy, when she reached her destination. The landlady greeted her warmly; she was evidently glad to have the responsibility lifted off her shoulders.

"Madame has seemed better ever since she had your telegram yesterday; but for all that, she has had a terrible night, such a fight she has for breath, poor dear. I sat up till past two with her, and then Lizzy took my place."

"I wil go and see her at once," said Mona.

"Do have a cup of tea first, Miss."

"No thank you—after."

Poor Madame Debrisay shed tears of joy at the sight of her dear child.

"And did your uncle agree to your coming?" she whispered.

"He was obliged," returned Mona, smiling. "Though he grumbled he was quite good about it. I suppose he remembered how kindly you nursed him."

"I would be so sorry if I was the cause of any bad feeling between you? But, oh! it is a joy and a comfort to have you near me, my darling!"

Though quite inexperienced in nursing, Mona's common-sense and careful observance of the doctor's directions soon taught her, and the atmosphere of cheerfulness she created was infinitely beneficial to the sufferer. A few days saw a decided improvement. Soon

Mona was released from the fatigue of regular night watching, and Madame Debrisay was able to take more nourishment; while the doctor announced that we were "doing very well indeed."

But Madame Debrisay was by no means without kind acquaintances. Her German friends made frequent inquiries and brought her flowers, and, soon after arrival, Mona heard a man's voice in loud peremptory tones asking many particulars respecting the invalid; after which came a basket of grapes with General Fielden's compliments.

"Now, isn't that nice!" exclaimed Madame Debrisay. "That is my artillery-man whom I described to you. If you knew the sort of old tiger he is, you would be amazed at his thinking of grapes for a poor sick woman."

"You evidently have power to soothe the savage breast," said Mona, laughing.

"It's for the sake of old times he comes. He called to see me one Sunday, and sat nearly an hour talking of his old love, my cousin Rose Nugent. I showed him your photograph, and he was greatly taken with it. He thought it like Rose, and I did not contradict him; but you are about as much alike as a cluster of grapes and a peach."

The day after, Mona had the pleasure of assisting her friend from her bed to an easy-chair by the fire, when the "girl" put in her head to say, the gentleman was in the drawing-room, and would Miss Craig speak to him.

"I will come directly," said Mona.

"Be sure you tell how much I enjoyed his grapes," said madame. "It was so good of him to send them. Just brush your hair over, dear. I want you to look nice."

Mona laughed, and humoured her, tying a small scarf of ivory-coloured old lace round her throat, to smarten up her olive green cashmere morning wrapper.

"He will not stay long, I suppose, but I will tell Mrs. Puddiford to give you your beef-tea."

So saying, Mona went into the front room, where a cheerful fire was burning, though otherwise it looked too accurately neat to have an inhabited air; and there on the hearthrug stood Lisle.

The sudden surprise brought a quick, bright blush to Mona's cheek, and she stood still an instant, the long, straight folds of her morning-gown sweeping from her graceful shoulders to the ground, giving her additional height and dignity.

"I hope I am not taking a liberty in calling so early?" said Lisle, coming forward to clasp the hand she held out, with the exclamation—

"I had no idea it was you! I fancied you were still in Scotland!"

"Pray, who *did* you expect then!" asked Lisle sharply, as he still held her hand, and looked with eager inquiry into her eyes.

"General Fielden—a friend of Madame Debrisay's," withdrawing her hand from his clasp. "Have you any message from my uncle? Is all well at Craigdarroch?"

"I do not think Mr. Craig knew that I was coming to London," he returned. "It was rather a sudden idea of mine. Are you not going to ask me to sit down?"

"Oh, yes! of course! Pray, sit down, Sir St. John. I am so startled at seeing you, that I forget my manners," she said, laughing. "How did you know where I was?"

"Well, you see, I speak the language, and I asked your kilted kinsman. You do not suppose I was going to lose sight of you?"

Something in his tone—his eyes—made Mona uneasy. She did not want to come to any explanation with him. She did not want to quarrel with him. Yet she told herself that he could not have been so eccentric as to have fallen in love with her over again. Had he really cared for her, he would never have tried to hand her over to another.

"I have been too busy, and too anxious about my friend Madame Debrisay, to think of anything else," said Mona coldly, as she drew a low chair to the fire; and Lisle seated himself at the table.

"Yes! I understand, you have been doing the Sister of Mercy business; and you look like it. Those bewildering eyes of yours look weary, and your cheek is pale. You want air and light. Can you not get off duty for an hour or two, and drive with me to Harrow or Richmond? It is a fine, brisk day, and it would be heavenly to have you all to myself for even a short spell."

"You are very good, Sir St. John," returned Mona calmly, "but it is impossible I could leave my patient yet."

"Later, then, I may be able to persuade you."

"You will not stay long in town at this unseasonable season," she said. "And I do not know when Madame Debrisay will be well enough to spare me."

"Oh, I shall be in town some time yet. You should not have left your Uncle's side all unguarded, Miss Craig. Your friend Miss Black seems a very insinuating young person, and it strikes me that Mr. Kenneth Macalister is considerably attracted to her bonnie blue een."

"Why do you think so?"

"Don't you know that a sort of electric atmosphere encompasses a man and woman who are in love, which reveals itself in lightning flashes of intelligence. No man who has loved, and still loves, can breathe it without comprehending much that is unspoken."

"This is quite a new idea to me."

"No doubt it is! You are too cold to feel these subtle influences. You used not to be so cold, Mona—I mean Miss Craig! You used to vibrate exquisitely to the touch of feeling or—"

"I have no doubt I was a silly, impressionable girl, like most *utantes*."

"No! there were not many *debutantes* like you, at least in my estimation, as no doubt you know."

"As to Kenneth and Miss Black," said Mona, turning a deaf ear to this compliment, "I think they are attached to each other, and it is my favourite scheme that they should marry, and comfort the last days of my uncle."

"Not a bad idea, only they would cut you out!"

"Oh! I should take my chance of that!—at least it would give me freedom."

"Freedom! Ah! And what would you do with it?"

"A tremendous question! When the time came you should see."

"Mona—" began Lisle, in a tone the appealing tenderness of which made Mona's heart beat vehemently; when Mrs. Puddiford, short and puffy, in her morning print dress and apron, opened the door and asked—

"Would you see General Fielden, miss? He says he will not keep you many minutes."

"Pray show him in," said Mona, with alacrity.

Whereupon the warlike-looking veteran described by Madame Debrisay entered, erect and austere in aspect, and making a fine old-fashioned bow to the young lady, said in quick, staccato style—

"Miss Craig, I presume?"

Mona rose and bent her head, smiling graciously as she did so.

"Took the liberty of asking to see you. Thought you would let me know how Madame Debrisay really is. It's always 'Better, better, better' with servants, till they startle you with—'Please, sir, he (or she) died this morning!'"

"I am happy to say, my dear friend Madame Debrisay is much better," said Mona, looking kindly into his eyes. "She is sitting up for the first time this morning. In a few days I hope she will be able to see you. She greatly enjoyed the delightful grapes you sent her."

"Did she? Glad of it! There's another basket out in the hall."

A short pause ensued, which was broken by Lisle saying in his pleasantest, frankest manner—

"I think I had the pleasure of meeting General Fielden—at Harrowby Chase—some years ago, though probably you do not remember me."

"I know your face, but I cannot fit it with a name," returned the General, looking sharply at him.

"My name is Lisle. I was then captain in the —th Hussars, and have been since on Sir Arthur Wriottesly's staff."

"Ah, yes; I remember. You won the military steeplechase at Bundlepore last year. Waller, of your regiment, was telling me about it," etc.; and the General seemed setting himself to enjoy a military and sporting gossip.

"They will stay all the afternoon," thought Mona. "I cannot stay here to listen." "As you seem to know each other," she said, "I will go and see if my patient wants anything."

"Do," returned General Fielden, shifting his position to a large and more comfortable chair, as if he did not intend to move for some time. "I will stay till you come back. I have a message from Madame Debrisay. Why the deuce she calls herself madame I cannot think."

"I am sorry I have an engagement," said Lisle, rising, his mouth curling with an expression of extreme annoyance, "and I must go good-morning. I suppose, Miss Craig, I am likely to find you at home any day? You really look very pale and tired. You must let me persuade you to take some exercise."

"Thank you! Madame Debrisay will soon be able to leave her room, and then I may go out. Good-bye, Captain Lisle."

The gentlemen exchanged bows, and Lisle departed.

"Never mind me," said the General. "I've nothing to do. I can wait."

"You seem to have been entertaining a few people," said Madame Debrisay with something of the old sparkle in her bright black eyes, as Mona came to her side.

"I have been entertaining your General, and—shall I say—your captain?"

"It was Lisle, then?" whispered Madame Debrisay eagerly. "I mean Sir St. John Lisle."

"Yes! I never was more surprised than when I found him waiting in the next room. I thought he was not coming soon before November."

"My dear Mona! mark my words—"

"Do not waste any, dear Deb," she interrupted quickly, "because I know the special chord of wisdom on which you are going to harp. Say nothing about Captain Lisle at present. General Fielden has brought you more grapes. He seems quite concerned about you."

"Now, isn't he good, poor old fellow? To think what a fine handsome soldier he was, and now he is all bones and eyebrows."

"He is soldierly-looking still. I have rather taken a fancy to him. Still I do not want him to stay all day. I want to write a long letter to Uncle Sandy. I will make up your fire, dear, before I go back; and let me settle the pillow under your head."

"And is Sir St. John gone?"

"Yes!"

"And when is he coming again?"

"Oh, I don't know! Very probably never!"

"Ah, Mona!" But Mona was gone.

"Madame Debrisay begs me to say how much she feels your kind thought for her," said Mona, smiling brightly and sweetly.

n old warrior, who had taken up a fortnightly which lay on le, and fixed his glasses on his nose.

!"—dropping his spectacles—"that's all right. Is she better? I daresay your being here helps her on a good bit. I hope you are not her daughter.

"I can act the part of one."

"I daresay you can, and do; but it's not the same. There is no right nor the duty. Men and women of my age and the better of sons and daughters, even though they give me pleasure! She has known you a long time."

"Ever since I was a girl of twelve, though I did not see very much of her till I came to live with my grandmother in London."

"Who was your grandmother?"—abruptly.

"Mrs. Joscelyn Newburgh."

"Ah! you were her grand-daughter? Ah!"

He seemed lost in thought for a few moments, and then re-

turning, "I am going abroad in a week or two. I always go to Pau or the Pyrenees in the winter. Can't live in England. Now I should like to see Madame Debrisay before I go. I have a picture to show her. You write and tell me when I may call?"

"Certainly, General Fielden. She will be very pleased to see you when she is strong enough, but she really has been very ill."

"I am sure of it; and I suspect her march through life has not been in velvet, though she looks wonderfully young and well. She is of a handsome race;" and the old man sighed quickly. "The doctor ought to make her keep indoors all the winter."

"Yes, my dear sir, that is impossible! She must keep up her exertions. She could not afford to lose her pupils."

"Well, that's it; that is a bad business," returned the General, "I am sorry to hear that." Then he asked some questions about Lisle, respecting which he seemed rather curious, and sat for a considerable time. He then suddenly started up, and begged pardon for occupying her time. "You see," he added, "I have nothing to do, and no one to talk to. Mind you tell me when Madame Debrisay can see me a good girl."

As he got out of bed, Madame Debrisay made rapid progress. She was of excellent and an untried constitution; nor had her attack, which was severe, been of the worst kind.

She was able to give General Fielden notice that her friend and that he was strong enough to "receive," sooner than she had hoped. He immediately, sat talking a long while, and seemed to enjoy the tea. The picture he had to show was a much-faded photograph of pretty Rose Nugent, and the old acquaintances indulged in retrospective conversation over it. This, and elaborate

descriptions of his aches and pains, formed the staple of his discourse.

Lisle had called twice. The first time, Mona was about to assist Madame Debrisay into the sitting-room, and she was obliged to explain and dismiss him; the second, she was really out.

The General evidently found himself comfortable and at home in the cosy sitting-room, while he imbibed his afternoon tea, and smiled grimly when Madame Debrisay, whose spirits were reviving, laughed at his complaints, and told him he would be nearly quite well if he would only believe it, and that she would back him against Lisle for a day's shooting, if he chose to try.

"It is all too pleasant to last," sighed madame, one gusty, cheerless afternoon, as General Fielden asked Mona if the servant would whistle a cab for him, as it was time for him to go. "I must soon get back to my work—that I do not mind; but Mona has been quite a month here, and I must let her go, and there's the shoe that pinches!"

"Go back to work!" cried the General. "You will kill yourself."

"Then it is a choice of deaths, *Monsieur le General*," she returned, laughing. "But I am good for some years yet. If I could only keep this girl with me, I should be ready to face anything."

"And why won't she stay?"

"Oh, she belongs to her uncle, and I would not interfere with her, though I suspect she prefers her own 'Deb.'"

Mona laughed, and blew madame a kiss.

"Ay, that's just it. It's the want of a legal right that plays the deuce!" and hastily bidding the ladies good-bye, he departed.

When Lisle perseveringly called a third time, he was partially rewarded. The tea-table was spread, and the presence of General Fielden procured him a *tete-a-tete*, for the General, finding Madame Debrisay played chess, decided in his own mind that a little tranquil amusement of that kind was the very thing for her, had set out the pieces, and was delightfully engaged in capturing her bishops and checking her queen.

"I began to fear I should never see you again," said Lisle, in a low voice, drawing near Mona, who sat at work by the fire. "You are so heartless and cruel. You never give a fellow the least chance."

"Chance of what?" asked Mona, threading her needle.

"Of speaking to you alone."

"But I do not want to speak to you alone. I have nothing to say that the whole world might not hear."

"How hideously cold and unkind you are, Mona. Well I have something to whisper in your ear alone, though, if you will listen favourably. I do not care how soon it may be proclaimed upon the house tops."

He leant towards her, seeking to meet her eyes.

Mona's colour rose, and then faded quickly, while she looked steadily at her work.

"Then do *not* say it," she replied softly.

"Do you mean what you say?"

"I do."

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNCLE SANDY FINDS AN OLD FRIEND.

BACK again at Craigdarroch, under the murky December clouds, back with the driving rain, and the wild wind weirdly sobbing among the solemn pine trees and leafless oaks.

Winter on the west coast, though less bitterly cold than in other parts of the country, is gloomy and threatening. There was something grand if oppressive in the stormy, threatening aspect of sky and sea seen through breaks in the swirls of grey mist driven hither and thither by fierce blasts from the broad Atlantic. Now and then the sun broke through cloud and vapour, and, dispersing the fleecy wrack that tried to shut him out, shed almost summer brightness on the wintry scene; while in the lull of the storm, one might imagine that a day had been stolen from April and thrown to the tempest-tossed earth to comfort her amid the gloom and stress of winter weather.

It was a dreary time for Mona.

Mary Black had been recalled to her home. The smallness of the little group, isolated as it were on that rugged hillside, and the feeling that it was a work of time, nay almost of danger, to escape to the comfort and companionship of a great city, created a sense of imprisonment exceedingly trying to the spirits.

Mona was quite ashamed of her own depression a little before Christmas. She felt as if she was forgotten by everyone. Lady Finistoun had written a pressing invitation to visit her at her home in Cumberland, when Mona was with Madame Debrisay, which, under any circumstances, she would have refused, and since she had given no sign, neither had Lisle. And even Madame Debrisay had not written for a fortnight. Mona had suggested a few weeks in Edinburgh to help them over the depth of the winter, but somehow Uncle Sandy did "not see it!"

There was nothing for it but to endure the inevitable routine. Breakfast at nine, and a consultation with the cook—for "supper" was a question of some difficulty; then a long spell of reading to her uncle; an escape to needle-work or music; dinner, after which Mr. Craig slumbered for a couple of hours, and Mona was, if the weather did not permit of going out; a walk to the farm

yard or round the garden if it did ; tea and the newspaper ; no work or music on Mona's part, more sleep on Mr. Craig's ; a little talk with Kenneth, then supper and bed. Day after day alike Mona did not think she could live through another winter.

At last the post brought excitement—surprise—an entirely new set of ideas—in a letter from Madame Debrisay.

"MY DEAREST MONA—I suppose you think me one of the most worthless and ungrateful women in the world ! Well, just wait and you will excuse me. My dear, imagine me writing behind a big fan to hide my blushes ! About a week ago I had come in very tired from one of my first attempts to do my usual day's work, and was refreshing myself with a cup of tea, when I saw my General. I sent for another cup, and we sat down cosily together.

" ' You are looking very ill,' he said, so staccato that he made me jump.

" ' I daresay I am,' said I. ' It is fatiguing at first. In another week I shall be all the better for my work. It would do me some good to sit here alone.'

" ' That's true,' he returned, as if he felt the truth in the bottom of his heart ; ' that's just what I think ;' and we each drained a goblet—no, I mean a cup, so deep was our conviction ! ' Still,' said he, as if out of his thoughts, ' I don't like to see you kill yourself.'

" ' Indeed I do not want to do anything of the kind ; life is still worth living for me.'

" ' That's because you have a good heart !' he cried, fortissimo.

" ' Don't flatter,' said I.

" ' I do not—I never did,' said he. ' Now, I am rather lonely—so are you ; suppose you come abroad with me and take care of me. It's not much of an offer to a handsome woman still in her prime,' said he, very civilly.

" ' My dear General,' said I, ' what would the world say ?'

" ' We'll gag the world, my dear Madame Debrisay, if you have no objection to go through a little ceremony !'

" ' Good gracious, General !' I cried, ' do you want to marry me ?'

" ' I do,' said he, very stoutly. ' I haven't much to offer you, but I can leave you enough for independence. We have both borne the burden of the day, so let us spend a peaceful evening together. I am a gruff sort of fellow, but not bad a heart ; and I'll not growl more than I can help. Just turn it over in your mind, and I will come to-morrow for an answer. If you say yes, we might get things arranged, and start in ten days or so for Nice.'

" ' Well, dear, I have said ' Yes,' and I think I have done well. We are to be married at the registry office, as neither of us are in the romantic age when we might want to make a religious festival.

of it. Herr and Frau Nachtigall are to be my witnesses, and an ancient veteran, an old comrade of General Fielden's, is to be his. I think the dear old fellow is quite fond of me. He brings me presents every day; one time a pair of gloves lined with fur, then a watch (it belonged to his wife, I imagine, but it is good and pretty), then a warm cloak. He is strong in wraps, and is quite cheerful about being married. Well, Mona, I'll do my very best to make him happy and comfortable. He is a good soul and a real gentleman. He sends his love to you, and says he is quite ready and willing to adopt you at any time, so, dear, you have not lost me—you have kept me and gained another and a much more potent friend. Write and tell me what you think of all this. I shall long to see you, and Uncle Sandy must spare you to us when we come back to Paris in the spring. Always your loving friend,

"G. DEBRISAY."

Mona read this important communication with sincerest pleasure. She had taken a fancy to the gruff, good-hearted old soldier, and she thought it very probable that her dear Deb, with her courage and experience, would probably keep him up to a proper pitch of amiability, *but*, and she gave a little sigh, she doubted that she herself would gain as much as Madame Debrisay anticipated. "She and the General will grow quite fond of each other and not want me. What a selfish idea! I ought to be ashamed of myself," she thought. "I will go and write a letter of congratulation, and I will send her poor grannie's cat's-eye and diamond bracelet for a wedding present; it is the prettiest thing I have. I wonder will my uncle think of giving her anything?" Here that gentleman's stick was heard tap, tapping as he approached after an expedition to the poultry-yard with Kenneth.

"Oh, Uncle Sandy!" she cried, as he came in and threw himself, in his usual style, into his particular chair, "I have just had a letter from Madame Debrisay. She is going to be married."

"Married! Aweel, there's nae fule like an auld fule! I'll be bound she's goin' to tak' some lad that might be her son!" he exclaimed, with severe contempt.

"You are wrong, uncle; she is going to marry General Fielden—who must be fifteen or twenty years older than she is—a nice old gentleman, who wants some one to take care of him and make his last days comfortable; so they think it wiser and more respectable to be married."

"That sounds mair reasonable. Has the General any siller? These soldier men scatter mair than they gather. It's just a misfortin' to the country to have the like o' them to support."

"He is not rich," returned Mona, leaving her uncle's abstract observation unanswered, "but fairly well off—at least for all they will want. I am very, very glad of this news; for though dear

Madame Debrisay has worked so hard, I do not think she has laid by anything, and the time will come when she can work no more."

"That's true, Mona; but it's no every young lassie would think o't, an' it mak's me think o' yoursel'. I'll not forget you, my dearie; and I'll no put it off ony mair. I'll go doon to Glasga, the week after next, and see Mr. Cochrane—that's my man, o' business—about puttin' a codicil to my will. You see, I hoped and hoped you and Kenneth would mak' it oot together. I wished ye baith to profit by my bits o' property—but that's a' ower."

"Dear uncle, you must think of Kenneth first; then, if you like to remember me, I shall be very grateful."

"I'll not forget ye! But you mauna anger me: ye do sometimes. You are a braw lassie—that I am not denyin'—but ye think too much o' yoursel'—ye think nae mon good enough for ye. There's yon Baronet—Sir St. John Lisle—he'd ask you to-morrow if you'd let him! I am auld and cauld, but I'm no sae doltled that I canna read what's in a mon's een—and he is a gran' gentleman. I'd like the folk to see Sandy Craig's niece 'her leddyship.'"

"But, uncle, I thought you despised and disapproved of titles?"
 "Eh, they are just senseless toys, but I canna pit them oot o' the world, and I like the best o' a' things to come to me and mine! Then a fine rich man wouldna care for a tocher wi' his wife, and so I'd hae mair for Kenneth—wha must marry some gude, respectable, weel-to-do lassie, wha will need sillier wi' her mon."

"Ah, well, uncle, it will be time enough to talk about refusing Sir St. John Lisle when he asks me! Now I am going to write to madame—what shall I say for you?"

"Eh, my best respects, an' I hope a blessing will licht on her new undertaking. But I see the boy coming wi' the bag; he'll hae the *Scotsman*, sae ye must read a bittie first. I'm varra keen to see how the election at Clachanbrig has gane—I'm fearin' it will be against the Liberals."

Mona therefore had to restrain her ardour, and wade through long columns of local politics, before she could pour out her warm congratulations to her beloved Deb.

A brisk interchange of letters ensued—extremely brief on Madame Debrisay's side. Then came a pause, and the announcement in the *Times*,—"On the 29th, at the Registry Office, Paddington, General Fielden . . . to Geraldine, widow of the late Arthur Debrisay, formerly Captain in the Kaiserin Marie Therese Hussars.—No cards."

It gave Mona a little additional sense of loneliness to think that sea and land stretched so widely between "Deb" and herself, for, after all, Deb was her mainstay.

Mr. Craig's intention of journeying to Glasgow was postponed.

he caught a very severe cold, and was obliged to keep his bed. This was a very trying time to the household, as the old man at that time was going to die, and demanded endless attention. It was therefore in the last week of January that, encouraged by a remarkable change of weather, he set out on his travels. He only managed to be away two clear days, but on the morning of the third Mona received a few almost illegible lines from him saying that he did not expect to get away till the following Saturday.

In this welcome breathing space Kenneth took advantage to pay a long visit to his Mary—leaving early one morning, and returning late the following night—an interval of utter loneliness which was most depressing to Mona.

Friday broke brightly, full of promise for a fine day. Already the month of spring came with the sea breeze to cheer and invigorate. Before Kenneth and Mona had risen from the breakfast-table, they had sat longer than usual talking of Mary, and discussing the subject of Kenneth's marriage with her could be broached to Uncle Sandy, a telegram was put into Mona's hand from that potentate,—“Will bring a gentleman with me to the bedroom.”

“Who can it be?” said Kenneth.

“The lawyer, most likely,” returned Mona.

“Don't think he would give Mr. Cochrane the best bedroom.”

“The coming man” is to have the best room, he must have a good upper. I shall see Phemie at once. The idea of a stranger coming is positively exciting! There are some grouse in the larder; I would take the nets, Kenneth, and get some fish, I think I can manage a respectable dinner—yes, dinner it shall be. Oh, what a sight!” with a sudden look of dismay, “suppose it is Sir St. Lisle?”

“And what for should it not be Lisle? He is a very nice man, and likes very much on you, Mona. I daresay it will be Lisle.” “I hope not. He is frightfully particular, and rather an epicure. It cannot be! What would bring him up here at this season?” “May be to see you, cousin Mona.”

“He would not take that trouble,” she said, more to herself than to her companion, as she left the room to hold high council with the butler as to the rubbing up of what silver her uncle possessed—then to review the gardener—to set Jessie to prepare the best room, and to keep up a good fire therein.

As reviving to have something to do—something to anticipate. If the nameless visitor proved to be Lisle, he would be welcome to break such an unbroken spell of monotony.

The rest of the day was busily employed till the shades of evening began to close—then having seen the table set and duly decorated with flowers; the claret placed in the temperature where it should be drunk; the drawing-room made pretty, and good fires burning here, Mona retired to dress.

"If it is Captain Lisle I need not look a fright," she thought "if it is a stranger, my uncle will be pleased to see me at my best. She well knew Uncle Sandy's pride in his belongings, a pride which caused some painful struggles in his soul between the love of a good appearance and the love of self.

So she put up her rich golden hair in becoming coils and showed wavy braids, arrayed herself in a polonaise of soft creamy muslin over her black satin skirt, and tied an old-fashioned enamel lock with black velvet round the snowy throat which her open corset permitted to be seen. This, and a large spray of red geranium and fern on one side of her bodice, were her only ornaments.

She was quite ready, and not dissatisfied with herself, some time before the hour at which the travellers were expected, so she sat down to the piano and played dreamily to Kenneth, who had also got himself up with care.

"They are late, are they not?" said Mona, and as she spoke the sound of approaching wheels made themselves heard.

"No," he returned; "the train must have been punctual—they come."

"Now the mystery will be solved!" cried Mona, rising and following Kenneth into the hall, where at the open door stood "Wallace, a fine, black collie, barking an uproarious welcome.

Uncle Sandy descended in a very dislocated fashion from the phaeton, with Kenneth's help, and advanced to meet Mona, who kissed him kindly,

"I'm awfu' weary," he said; "I hope the dinner is ready?"

"Yes, quite ready, uncle," she returned, darting a curious look beyond him at a gentleman who was in the act of crossing the threshold—a man not much above middle height, wrapped in a loose ulster, the high collar of which almost meeting the travelling cap pulled over his eyes, effectually concealing his face. He came forward under the lamp, and turning to him, Mr. Craig said with unusual warmth—

"I'm varra glad to see your mother's son under my roof. This is my niece—I was near saying my daughter—Miss Craig."

The stranger threw back his coat and took off his cap. As he bowed, the strong light fell upon him, and Mona found herself face to face with Leslie Waring, greatly changed and looking years older, but still unmistakably Leslie Waring.

For a moment or two Mona felt blind and dizzy, so great, so sudden was the surprise. Then she recovered herself all the more rapidly, because he seemed perfectly unmoved—while she could only exclaim in an agitated voice—"Mr. Waring!"

He said quietly, "This is a most unexpected pleasure," and took the hand she extended mechanically.

"Eh, mon!" cried Uncle Sandy, "do ye ken Mona? How ~~she~~ ye never told me."

"I had no idea Miss Joscelyn was in any way related to you," said Waring, with a smile.

"Miss Joscelyn ! There's no Miss Joscelyn here. This is my niece, Mona Craig !"

"I remember now," said Waring quickly ; "I beg your pardon. I had the pleasure of knowing Miss Craig some years ago, in London."

"It is varra remarkable ; but there's time enough to talk about it a'. Go, tak' aff yer coat. Kenneth, show Mr. Waring his room. Come, my bairnie, tell Jesse to bring up the vivers. I'm just faint like. It has been a cold journey."

"Will you take a little whisky and water at once, uncle ?" asked Mona, trying to remember her duties with an effort, so dazed did she feel at this astounding re-appearance.

"Aweel, it might be better to do so. Just hang up my coat, will you. Eh, but you have a fire that's enough to set a' the chimneys in Kirktoon burning ; still it looks gran'. The young mon will think auld Sandy Craig has a fine hocse o' his ain. It's varra strange your knowing each other.—Thank you, my dearie," as she handed him his allowance of whisky and water.

"But, uncle, how in the world did *you* come to know Mr. Waring ?"

"Me ? Aweel I knew him when he was a wee bairn, but it's lang years since. His mother was Mr. Leslie's daughter. You'll mind my telling you o' the great hoose o' Maceachern and Leslie. Leslie was the gran' gentleman of the firm ; and his daughter—eh, my word, but she was bonnie ! she was the young leddy that ought to have been my wife, and this lad's eyes are jist like his mother's—she married a proud, upsetting Englishman ; but the siller was hers, and the boy was named after her father. He has been fulish, I'm fearin', and has spent a cruel lot o' mon y, gaming awful and racin' and rampaging. Something turned him wrong ; noo, he seems more wiselike, and has settled doon on a farm in America. He cam over aboot some law plea, a bit o' money that was coming to him through his mother, and sae he came on to Glasga, to speak to Mr. Cochran, who was aye the adviser of a' the hoose, an' there he found me. I was right glad to meet him, and—but here he is, and Jessie, too. The deener's ready. I'm glad to see you in my hoose, Mr. Waring. Give me your arm. I am a puir frail body."

Waring threw a smiling glance at Mona, as if asking pardon for preceding her, and led his host into the dining-room.

Mona took her place at the head of the table with an overpowering sense of embarrassment, mixed with self-reproach.

"Something had turned him wrong ?" Uncle Sandy said, "was she that 'something' ?"

Pride came to her assistance, however ; she must not let him see how overwhelmed she really was. By a resolute effort she recalled

her self-control and played the part of hostess with sweet grace and simple kindness ; but though avoiding Waring's eyes, she observed how greatly he had changed. He looked taller because he had grown thinner. His strong figure looked firmer and more manly ; his face longer, darker, more embrowned, and grave, if not a little sad : it had completely lost the florid fleshiness of early manhood ; his eyes, too, seemed larger and more thoughtful ; but his thick moustaches, drooping to either side, showed when he smiled that his rather large teeth were as brilliantly white as before ; his hands, that used to be so creamy and plump, were burnt and black, showed both bone and muscle, as though they and hard work were well acquainted. Yes, he was changed wonderfully, and proved. His old good-humoured eagerness to please and to be pleased was replaced by a profound repose of manner, as if the effervescence of youth had entirely evaporated, and left a slight weary but kindly quietude behind.

He ate his dinner as if he liked it, and did not say much ; once he looked round the pretty, comfortable room admiringly, and exclaimed,—

"You cannot think Mr. Craig, how delightful all this seems to me. The bright silver and glass, the flowers, the look of refinement, these things want a woman's touch."

"I suppose you have no young leddies out yonder?"

"No ; my partner, like myself, is a bachelor. Indeed, it has hitherto been too rough for ladies ; but we are improving rapidly. We had nearly finished a log house when I left : quite an architectural mansion," added Waring laughing.

His laugh was still frank and pleasant.

"I hope your partner is an honest man," quoth Mr. Craig.

"I hope so too. Indeed, I believe he is. He comes of a respectable English family, and has been accustomed to the life of a ranch since his early boyhood. He is a first-rate judge of cattle and horses, and if he had not much capital to put into the venture, he could buy what is quite as valuable—knowledge and practice."

"Eh, I'm no that sure. There's as much danger as profit so times in the knowledge of penniless men."

"Oh, Watson is not penniless ; and he is really a very good fellow."

"That is fortunate," said Mona, forcing herself to join in the conversation. "I suppose you have no other companion?"

"None. A chance traveller asks for hospitality now and then, but he never stays long."

"It must be a lonely life, though I should not dislike it," said Kenneth.

"I certainly do not. There's freedom and plenty of work, when night comes one is too tired for anything but a good night's rest."

daursay you are mair peaceful and content to be awa' frae wdie o' conceited fules and grinning cheats they ca' the l," said Uncle Sandy viciously.

man nature is pretty much the same in the wilderness or ld of social life," said Waring good-humouredly. "It ut poor philosophy to cry out against the world I have e I played the fool there; on my head be it if I threw ne. There are as many good fellows—or as few good one state of life as another."

ve that," said Kenneth. "I should like well to see your Waring."

on't you come out for a bit? It is a sort of a life you I think."

it he has his work cut oot for him here?" cried Uncle He'll find it best to bide wi' me. Noo, tell me how mony tle have ye, forbye horses?"

three men plunged into talk, from which Mona collected g had invested almost all the capital left him—after extravagance and foolish speculation—in a ranche near medwoods on the Pacific coast, and that, as yet, he had ry little, though his hopes were high, and he had evi- own himself energetically into the undertaking.

silence gladly. Waring's presence—his steady compo- uiet submission to the inevitable—touched her deeply. to cry out,—

ou forgiven me? Can I atone for the pain I inflicted?"

t probably he had nearly forgotten that he once loved oped to pass his life with her. She panted to be alone, to her thoughts—to master the disturbance of her mind. seemed so absorbed in conversation, Mona thought she away unobserved; but her uncle noticed her movement.

bit, my lassie?" he cried. "We've sat here lang e'll a' come wi' ye to the drawing-room. You shall sing und then I'll gang awa' to my bed. My niece sings fine, g," he added, as he took Mona's arm.

that, Mr. Craig," returned Waring, opening the door pass through; "I remember her songs well."

t that she blushed crimson, while she said in a low tone 3,—

scarcely any voice to-night—do not ask me to sing."

oot, my dearie! you'll please us weel."

od a moment irresolute after Uncle Sandy had tumbled oths of his chair. Waring came to her side, and, looking perhaps a little sadly, into her eyes, said,—

refuse Miss Craig! You don't know what a treat the woman's voice is to an exile like myself, especially as in I shall go back to the wilds again."

"Then I will do my best," returned Mona simply, and she to the piano.

The song she chose was a pretty, quaint German ditty she learned while abroad—for she did not wish to revive painful recollections by singing anything that might be familiar to Waring. moved away and sat in deepest thought while he listened.

"Aweel, that's not aune of my favorites. I am not much of a musician—my opportunities have been scant—but I have an unconquered ear," said Uncle Sandy. "Give us a Scotch sang, my dear." "If I am not presuming too far," said Waring, coming over to lean on the piano, "Might I ask for an old favourite,—'I Adair?'"

"Ay, that will do," from Uncle Sandy.

"I need not have been so careful to spare his feelings," thought Mona. "I am making a fool of myself. It is an age since I attempted it," she said aloud; "but I will try it if you like."

It was dreadfully annoying, but she could not steady her nerves. She could not keep a certain tremulous pathos out of her voice. Men are so conceited—they had such a high opinion of themselves that perhaps Leslie Waring would fancy, as she was so upset meeting him, that she regretted having rejected him. Ah, no! She was too frank and honest, too simple and unselfish, to need guarded treatment Leslie required. Leslie! Why, he was not comparable to Leslie Waring. What wonders time and trouble do for the latter!

"Thank you," said Waring, from his chair in a shadowy corner where he had retreated when she began the song he had asked for. "That was an immense treat."

"Ay, there's nae music like Scotch music, nor is there any for melody an' poethry, an' spirit, an'—an' historical value," said Uncle Sandy.

"I believe the Irish claim 'Robin Adair' as their own," said Mona.

"Claim it! I daursay they do," said Uncle Sandy contemptuously.

"They'd aye claim everything; but if that lilt is a Scotch, as I am no Scotch. Come, give me your arm, Mona, I'll just get my bed. I'm awfu' weary."

"Then maybe Mr. Waring would like a smoke with me in the kitchen. I think we will have it all to ourselves in a few minutes," said Kenneth.

"Thank you, I should. One grows a little too fond of the world when one is freed from the restraints of society."

"It's a very pernicious practice; but it's just talking to the wind to protest against it. Good-night, sirs. Kenneth there are keys. Mr. Waring will need a drappie after his pipe."

"Good-night," murmured Mona as she gave her arm to her uncle. Waring bowed, but did not attempt to shake hands with her.

It was an infinite relief to be alone, and locked in her own room. For a long time she thought confusedly, or rather a confused mass of mixed memory and thought thronged her brain, without any effort of her will.

How vividly Waring's face, pale with painful emotion, the day they last met, came back to her. He had quite forgiven her: she felt that. He was a really good fellow. She wished they could be friends again, as she was with Kenneth; but that could never be, she feared. She never could feel at ease with him. He looked as if he had suffered a good deal. Was it her fault? Oh, no! she never could admit that. She should like to let him know that she had generally a very good opinion of him, but how should she find time to do so, when he had said more than once that he would only stay a couple of days? What a curious contradictory jumble life was altogether! Mona felt unaccountably unhappy, and laying her fair head on the pillow, she wept long and quietly before sleep closed her wet eyes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MAN PROPOSES.

MORNING brought renewed spirit and fresh courage. Mona could not help smiling at the singular combination of circumstances which brought her once more face to face with the man whose wife she had so nearly been. It was foolish to feel so uncomfortable about meeting him. As he was perfectly unembarrassed, she was resolved to imitate his composure, and treat him with friendly cordiality.

He deserved consideration at her hands, for he had behaved tolerably with chivalrous forbearance.

Still, she did not leave her room quite so early as she usually did. She was determined to run no unnecessary risk of a *tete-a-tete* interview.

Uncle Sandy and Kenneth were already in the dining-room when she entered, and went through the ceremony of infusing the tea before her uncle began the long, rambling, extemporary prayer with which he always opened the day. They had hardly risen from their knees, when Waring came in and wished the party good-morning.

"I hope you rested well?" said Uncle Sandy.

"I was extremely comfortable, but I dreamed furiously," he replied. "I seemed to have lived over my whole life since we parted last night. I hope the strain of Scotch blood in my veins has not developed a tendency to second sight, now that I am in my mother's native land, for I have had quite awful warnings in my visions. Some disaster hangs over me. However, that is nothing new, and

I suppose I shall live through many more before I have done with things."

"Shall I give you tea or coffee, Mr. Waring?" asked Mona.

"Coffee, please."

He turned towards her, and suddenly meeting her eyes, the colour rose in his brown cheek.

"Were your dreams in the morning?" she made haste to ask, anxious to hide her own confusion by speaking.

"Yes! It was daylight when I woke from the last and worst."

"Then be of good courage. The evil in your dream will prove good in disguise, and you will get your wish."

"Thank you! I accept the omen from your lips!"

"Are ye no for parritch?" asked Uncle Sandy. "It's varra wholesome and strength'nin'."

"Thank you, no. This hare pie is excellent."

"I wish Mary Black were here," observed Mona to Kenneth. "She is a little witch for reading dreams and telling fortunes!"

"Ay, she's a witch! That is *very* true, Mona."

"Uncle!" cried Mona, "may I ask Mary Black to come and stay here again? I have not seen a female face for months."

"Yes; you can ask her. She is varra welcome. It's a nice blithe lassie," explained Mr. Craig to Waring, "and sings as sweet a lilt as you'd hear anywhere."

"Sorry I have so little chance of seeing her, sir. My time grows short."

"Hoot, toot, man! Ye can stay till next week?"

"I am afraid I am too unfortunate to be able to accept your kind hospitality. I have business in London, and I want to take the Cunard boat on the 11th."

"I dinna like to let you go. We'll talk about it, you an' me! Kenneth, is it going to be fine the day?"

"I think there will be showers."

"You may be tolerably sure of that, Kenneth," said Mona.

"I want to tak' Mr. Waring round the place, and let him have a glint at Strathairlie."

"Strathairlie?" repeated Waring. "Hadn't Finistoun shooting hereabouts?"

"He has a deer forest—a great stretch of unreclaimed land, whaur hundreds of honest sheep ought to be grazing, instead of its being a playground for a hantle o' feckless nobles," quoth Uncle Sandy.

Waring, however, was too much occupied with his own thoughts to heed him.

"Didn't Finistoun marry one of the Everards?" he asked—"a very pretty girl?"

"Weel, she is a bonnie wee wife," said Uncle Sandy; "and, though she is a bit feckless, I didna object to her coming to see

But they are a cauld, stiff, upsettin fam'ly ! It was weel onna she found a gude, kind uncle to tak' her in when yon rd folk pit her oot."

ring glanced sharply at Mona, who coloured with vexation, and haughtily—

"It is not necessary to trouble Mr. Waring with our family affairs."

"That's wrang wi' ye ?" asked her uncle, in some surprise.

"You have capital sport about here, I suppose ?" said Waring, anxious to change the subject.

"Fishes—rod or gun, it's all the same. You can fish or shoot the long day !" cried Kenneth enthusiastically. "Sir St. John said he never saw birds more abundant."

"Isle ?" repeated Waring quickly, addressing Mona. "I thought he was in India !"

"He returned on the death of a relation, whom he succeeded," replied Mona briefly.

There was a short pause. Then Kenneth proposed that he should ask Mr. Waring for a round of the place, and along the road to the Lodge, before dinner ; and that after it uncle should show them the garden, the farm-yard, and the stables.

They were still discussing their plans when Mona rose to visit her uncle, and hold high counsel anent dinner. She felt it a relief to escape Waring's eyes, though he rarely looked at her ; and his presence, which had in it, to her fancy, a tinge of melancholy, that she felt her with self-reproach. So, having completed her task down the garden, she went to her own room. Then, finding that the walking had started, and sound of voices had ceased, she concluded the pedestrian had started, and went to the drawing-room, intending to dust a few pieces of old china she had persuaded her uncle to buy for her on their travels, with her own fair hands.

She had hardly commenced when approaching footsteps startled her, and Waring came into the room, and closed the door behind

"I thought you had gone out with Kenneth," said Mona, laying down her duster, with a curious feeling of being caught.

"We were just starting when one of your uncle's tenants came to show to him, and Mr. Macalister's presence was needed in what they call 'the museum.'"

Mona smiled.

"You have not seen our museum yet ?"

"No," returned Waring, and there was a pause.

Mona stood looking at the fire, and she hesitated what to say next.

"I am glad to have this chance of speaking," resumed Waring gently, and looking full at her, a kind expression in his handsome, brown eyes, "for I want to explain that I would not intruded on you had I had the least idea who the niece was

about whom Mr. Craig spoke with such very justifiable pride. I am afraid that—that I cannot be a very welcome guest to you!”

Mona murmured a polite denial.

“If you would let me speak frankly to you, I should be so glad. I don't want to say anything that would displease you.”

He coloured slightly, but his eyes laughed.

“Oh! I am sure you would not!” cried Mona. “Yes! say anything you like.”

She felt herself again.

“Thank you. Well, I am very glad to see you, and awfully glad you have found a friend in old Craig. He is a character—excuse me for speaking so unceremoniously.”

“Of course! He really is very good to me, and I am fond of him, as I ought to be! But it is not very lively at Craigdarroch in the winter! Now, Mr. Waring,” coming over and standing by the fireplace, her hands clasped and dropped easily before her, “I am very pleased to see you again, and shall be so glad to be friends—quite good friends—again.”

She smiled and blushed charmingly as she spoke.

“So shall I,” very shortly. “Do you know I have thought and tormented myself a great deal about you. Oh, no!—not as I used, I mean; because I did not know what had become of you. I knew you did not stay on with the Everards. I am afraid they did not behave very well.”

“I fear I deserved their displeasure.”

“I don't think you did. How is Madame Debrisay?”

“Very well indeed, and no longer Madame Debrisay. She is married to General Fielden. I fancy you know him—an old artillery officer.”

“No! Is it possible? I remember old Fielden. It will be very nice for him to have such a capital woman to jog on with for the rest of the road. I always liked her.”

“Well, she returned the compliment.”

“I am afraid she would not have thought much of me if our acquaintance had continued. I was very weak and reckless.”

He looked steadily at her as he said this.

“I have heard something of the kind,” murmured Mona, unclasping her hands, and putting back her hair with a pretty, troubled gesture, as she generally did when in any little difficulty. “And—and (we are to speak freely, you know), I was infinitely distressed. I feared I might in some measure—”

“No, no!” he interrupted. “I see what you mean. It is the thought of a kind heart; but you are in no way responsible. I ought to have been man enough to do right for right's sake. No one is to blame but myself. I let that passion for gaming, which I confessed to you once,” he sighed quickly, “quite overmaster me; *in fact, it was a bad bit of my life just before that day I met you in*

nsington High Street, walking with young Macalister. Then I d a severe attack of fever. I was all but gone. If I had been of y value to anyone, I should have died, no doubt. After that I ne to my right mind, and determined to do what I could with the nains of my fortune. In so doing I lost more. Then I fell in th my present partner, and threw in my lot with his. The life is althy, and rather suits me. I shall stick to it, and, perhaps, make nething of it. Do you know, it quite cheers me up to feel friends d all right with you, at anyrate for the few hours I shall remain ; d even after, though, probably, we may never meet again, you'll e me a kind thought, and a good wish sometimes."

"I always thought kindly of you," said Mona gently, while she t the tears in her eyes. "You deserve so much from me ! Yes, is very nice to be good friends ; and you must tell me all about ur life in the wilds."

"I beg your pardon !" cried Kenneth, bursting into the room ; out I could not get away before. Come, we have lost too much ne already."

"Would your cousin come with us ?" asked Waring. "If she a walk far. It is a fine morning. What do you say, Miss aig ?"

"I should like to come very much," said Mona frankly. She felt lightly at home and at ease once more. "I must ask Uncle ndy if he can spare me ; and I can turn back when I have gone far ough, so as not to impede your progress."

She went swiftly away to seek her uncle. Waring walked to the ndow, and stood with folded arms in deepest thought, quite livious that Kenneth was talking to him.

But Mona soon returned to announce that she had permission to sent herself, and in a few minutes the trio were climbing the hill e to gain the upper road by a short cut.

It was a very delightful expedition. Waring said the scenery passed all he had ever seen before, for beauty, though he might ve met with grander views. They found endless subjects for con- rsation, and when Mona proposed to leave them, both gentlemen ided that they would return with her, as it would be impolite not return in time for dinner.

Mona was surprised at her own light-heartedness, at the delightful use of harmony which soothed her spirit after her short confiden- l talk with Waring. How generous he was in exonerating her m all blame. How glad she was to be on frank, friendly terms h him. It was evident he had quite got over his old fancy for , so they could enjoy each other's society with perfect safety for , little time he was with them. Alas ! that it was too short. ll, let to-morrow take heed of itself, she would enjoy to-day.

And it went quickly, too quickly. Waring was shown everything about the place by Uncle Sandy himself, who generally bestowed degree of attention and favour on his guest such as Mona had never seen bestowed on any other visitor. Then, in the evening, Waring seemed never tired of her songs—excusing his frequent demands the score of his speedy departure to a land where the ditties of cowboy, or the crack of his whip, were all the music he would hear.

Then came the inevitable hour of parting.

Waring had still some business to settle in Glasgow respecting the small sum he had inherited, and after a few days there he had to visit London, finally embarking at Liverpool.

Mona could hardly steady her voice to bid him good-bye. It seemed too cruel that he should be expatriated merely for a little not a little—imprudence; and, say what he might, Mona could not but perceive that had she married him, he would never have committed the faults and follies which had changed his life.

Waring himself was quite calm and cheerful. He promised Uncle Sandy to write occasionally. He begged Kenneth to come and bid him a visit whenever it could be managed; and he looked for an instant, kindly and gravely, into Mona's eyes, holding her hand in a painfully tight grasp; then he mounted the phaeton in which Kenneth was already seated, and they drove off.

"Noo they are awa'," said Uncle Sandy, as he hobbled toward the library, followed by his niece, "we'll have yesterday's paper when the new one comes. I read verra little."

Mona made no reply; she would have given anything for half-hour's private thought, and the relief of tears, but this need must be concealed at any cost.

"Eh," continued her uncle, falling into his chair, "yon's an uncommon fine young man. You see how the Scotch bluid tells him. He was awfu' fulish an' led away for a bit, but he has come right, like a brave chiel; and he has his mother's eyes."

"Then the late Mrs. Waring must have had very fine eyes," said Mona, rousing herself to speak cheerfully.

"Ay, she had that—she had that. From a' young Leslie (I can bide his ither name)—from a' he tells me, I'm thinking he'll do wot oot yonder. It's a rough life, but it's honest and healthfu'; he'll get mair good oot o't than he'd find among a pack o' pro-upsetting fule-bodies in London." Then with a groan, "Eh, my limbs are bad the day. Noo, my dearie, just look at the article, an' after that, there's something aboot the Colonies I wad like to hear."

So Mona put away the strange, passionate regret which had overwhelmed her, and read steadily for more than an hour, by which time she was completely herself. Then Uncle Sandy wished for his walk, and took her arm, pottering about till nearly dinner time, when Kenneth did not return.

"I wonder what keeps the lad," said Mr. Craig. "He isn't often long on the road; an' I begin to want my dinner."

"We need not wait for him."

"Naw, but it wants mair than half-an-hour yet to the time. I'll tak' a cup o' milk wi' a drap o' whisky intil, just to stop the craving."

This refreshment administered, the old man took up the paper himself, and began to study the state of the Funds. He was perfectly well able to read himself, but his niece's soft voice and clear enunciation were luxuries to which he considered himself entitled, and Uncle Sandy was not the man to forego a hair's-breadth of his rights. Over the "price current," however, he loved to linger, and edge for himself, after Mona had skimmed it for him.

Mona went to put some fresh flowers in the drawing-room. She, too, was anxious for Kenneth's return; she hoped (as he was to call at the post-office) that he would bring her a letter from Mary accepting the invitation she had been permitted to send. She had grown fond of the gentle Highland lassie, and she greatly appreciated the companionship of an intelligent girl.

Mona resolutely directed her thoughts to some little plans of work and practice to be shared by Mary, when the distant sound of approaching wheels caught her ear, and, going to the window, she saw the phaeton crawling slowly up the steep road. Kenneth held the reins; but, could she believe her eyes, Waring was again beside him! What had happened? He could not have missed the train! They had started in abundant time. Waring was leaning back in a languid manner quite unusual.

"Uncle Sandy!" she cried, running into the library, "here is Mr. Waring returning with Kenneth."

"Ye don't say so!" cried Mr. Craig, catching up both sticks, which always stood in the corner beside his chair, and moving with unusual rapidity to the front door—"What's that for?"

Mona followed, her heart beating fast. They both reached the steps as Kenneth pulled up.

"Where's the gardener?" he cried, as he threw the reins on the back of the old horse and sprang down. "Mr. Waring has met with a bad accident, and can scarce get out alone."

"Guid preserve us! what has happened?" cried Mr. Craig. "Rin—rin, and ca' Robbie; he's back frae his dinner."

Mona sped swiftly to the garden without a word.

"It's a stupid business," said Waring cheerfully, but in a faint voice. "I am afraid I shall be on your hands for some time. Macmaster will tell you all about it. My right arm is broken." Here the gardener came running up, followed by Mona at a less rapid pace.

"Here!" exclaimed Kenneth, "go to his left, Robbie; put your arm on his shoulder, Waring. I'll help you on the ill side."

"I think I can get out well enough by myself."

But when he tried to move, Mona saw that he winced and grew white. It was with great care and slowly that they managed to get him into the house. Then it could be seen that his right arm was bound up, and that his coatsleeve had been cut open.

"He had best go to his room at once," said Kenneth. "I have the doctor's directions; and there's composing medicine and what not in the trap. Come along, Phemie," to the cook, who had hurried to the scene of action; "and, Mona, fetch some wine."

"I feel awfully ashamed of myself for giving all this trouble," said Waring, his eyes resting on Mona's for a moment with a deprecating glance.

She, still silent and pale from the shock she had received, went noiselessly and brought the wine by the time the little procession had reached Waring's room, which the housemaid had not yet dismantled.

She poured out a glassful, and placed it in his left hand, which, as she saw it trembled very much, she steadied with her own.

"I fear you are suffering," she said softly.

"Oh, of course I am in pain, but there is nothing serious the matter; only I fear I must be a nuisance for some time."

"It canna' be helpit noo, my laddie," said Uncle Sandy, with unusual tenderness, "and you are right welcome to my hoose."

"He must get to bed!" cried Kenneth, with authority. "That's the doctor's order. He must be kept *very* quiet, to avoid fever. Mona, will you see that the things are taken out of the phaeton; and the letters, Mona."

This done, there was nothing for it but to wait till Kenneth was at liberty to explain the cause of the accident.

Meantime she found a letter from Mary, evidently written in high glee, accepting Mr. Craig's invitation, and promising to be with her friends the following week.

"Noo, tell us a' about it, Kenneth!" cried Uncle Sandy, when they at length returned to the dining-room, after seeing Waring made comfortable.

"Well, you see, we were in plenty time, and when we found the ticket-clerk was not there, we went into the yard to look at some horses that were waiting for a box that was coming from Glasgow—for Waring is very keen about horses—and presently up comes Tulloch the grocer's big cart with some heavy boxes, and that wicked black mare of his in the shafts. The driver left the cart at the far side of the yard. Whether anything frightened the beast or no, I cannot tell, but all of a sudden it started off towards the gate, kicking and squealing. There was a decent-like woman and a bairn standing about, and the bairn had got in the way. There was a scream that it would be killed. Waring made a dash for the child, and just threw it to the mother; but somehow in doing so he fell,

and got a kick from the mare on the shoulder, while the wheel went over his arm. He was insensible for a few minutes. Then we got a bench and carried him to the doctor's, who, by good luck, was at home. He was some while setting it, for it's a bad break; but he says it was a mercy he was so far from the beast's hoof, or the shoulder would be smashed, which would be a much more serious matter. As it is, it's a nasty bruise, Waring seemed chiefly put out about missing his passage, but I promised to write to his partner for him."

"It was varra unlucky," said Uncle Sandy.

"And there's his dream come out," observed Kenneth.

"Ach! hold yer havers about dreams, an' sic fule-talk!" cried Uncle Sandy contemptuously.

"Well, maybe it is; but I heard him mutter to himself something about 'his fate,' and he is not a superstitious Hielander."

"Dr. Donaldson did not think his injuries dangerous?" asked Mona.

"Oh, no! Specially if he did not get feverish. He's coming over to see him this evening. I'll just have the big easy-chair in his room to-night, and doze a bit in it, in case he wants anything."

"Ay, 'twill be better so! If he could get a gude lang sleep, it would be the making o' him."

It was a curious, disturbed, uneasy day. Uncle Sandy was especially restless, and time went at once quickly and slowly. Mona felt she could not settle to anything, and all waited eagerly for the doctor, who was later than they expected.

He pronounced the patient to be doing well; but much depended on his getting rest; and he finally sat down cheerfully to supper, and enjoyed a long "crack" with Uncle Sandy afterwards.

The next few days were each a repetition of the other. Mona felt herself very useless. All she could do was to lighten the labours of the cook by instructing the housemaid to do a good deal in the kitchen.

The doctor came daily, and Kenneth was quite devoted to the sufferer when he was in-doors. At length the monotony was broken by the arrival of Mary Black, whose interest and excitement at the news which awaited her was considerable.

"I hope I am not in the way, Mona, dear? Why did you not put me off?"

"You will be of the greatest assistance, Mary. To-morrow Mr. Waring is to be allowed to move into the drawing-room. The swelling and inflammation in his shoulder is almost gone; and Dr. Donaldson says, that although he is to be kept quiet, he is not to be allowed to mope, so you must help to amuse him."

"Is it me! Ah, Mona! I could not amuse a fine London gentleman."

"Fine! Poor Mr. Waring! In his most prosperous days he

never had anything fine about him. It is wonderful how much an invalid increases the work in a house ; and I shall be very grateful to you if you can do some of the reading to Uncle Sandy."

The first time that Waring left his own room for the drawing-room was a great event.

He looked pale and languid, and his eyes seemed unusually large. Mona and Mary had placed cushions and plaids on the sofa, and were ready to welcome him when he came in, leaning on Kenneth's arm.

"So glad to see you able to get about again," murmured Mona, placing a pillow to support his back, and another under his head.

"Thank you !" he said. "It is almost worth being smashed up to be petted and made much of. It is a new and delightful sensation for me."

"You will soon be quite independent of us all ! Let me introduce Miss Black to you—my one great friend. She is quite ready to assist in the process of spoiling you."

"Where is Uncle Sandy ?" asked Kenneth.

"In the garden, I think. He has a dispute with the gardener about asparagus, and he has found some passage in a book on the 'Kitchen Garden,' which he thinks will annihilate Robbie Sanders."

"Suppose we go and find him," said Kenneth to Mary, who blushed vividly, and saying, "If you like," rose and went to find her hat.

Kenneth followed her. As he left the room Mona's eyes met those of Waring. They both smiled, and she felt that Kenneth had been very confidential to his new friend in their frequent interviews.

"Now, what can I do for you ?" asked Mona gently. "The doctor says that you are to be amused, though not excited."

"Oh ! if you would lap me in Elysium, read to me ! I find I get awfully tired holding up a book."

"With pleasure ! What shall it be ? The papers ?"

"No, a book—any book."

"Do you deign to read novels !"

"I have liked some novels."

"We have nothing very new, but here is a volume of essays—Freeman's Essays, which are more interesting than many novels. Perhaps you have read them ?"

"No, never ! Would you mind sitting opposite me ? I shall hear you better ! Do you know, it seems to me as if some queen of romance was condescending to comfort her wounded servant !"

"You were not wounded in my service !" said Mona, a smile dimpling round her mouth. "Now, you must not talk, Mr. Waring."

He bent his head, and so disarranged his cushions.

Mona gently replaced them, and began her lecture.

Waring listened, apparently with much interest, and occasionally made an observation which proved it; then she herself became absorbed in the charm of style and idea, and she read on for some time without looking up. When she did so, Waring's eyes were closed, and his head rested against the pillow. Mona thought he had fallen asleep, and resumed, lest a sudden break might wake him, read a few sentences in a carefully-subdued voice, and then ceased and sat looking at him with an expression of tenderness and compassion of which she was unaware.

Suddenly Waring opened his eyes and fixed them on her for a moment, with a look of pain and sadness—but only for a moment, the next, he exclaimed—

"You thought I was asleep, but I was not; I was only dreaming of heavenly dreams."

"That implies sleep," said Mona, shaking her head.

"I can repeat the two last sentences," said Waring, and he did.

"I like books better than I did," he continued. "I used to be an awfully stupid chap at school. I fancy I was exceedingly foolish, not to say backward, for my years. Now you are tired, you must be tired: don't read any more."

"I read much longer to Uncle Sandy; but you must have some rest now. I will get it for you."

"Was ever any fellow in such clover!" exclaimed Waring.

Then she brought it daintily, set forth on a snowy cloth, and held it for him, nor did he eat it up too fast.

"I did not think I should put our new friendship to the test so soon?" he said.

"This is not a test," returned Mona gravely, "it is only the exercise of ordinary humanity."

"Then how—" he was beginning, when Uncle Sandy came in full of pleasure and congratulations, and Mona left them together.

CHAPTER XXV.

A DISCOVERY.

UNCLE SANDY had rarely appeared to such advantage as on this occasion. Leslie Waring was associated with perhaps the wellspring of romance that had ever bubbled up for him in that somewhat arid plain of his life.

To him there were but two really great men in modern times—they were Maceachern and Leslie—the creators of the happiness which he was so proud to have been connected. To have the son of one of these potentates under his roof, treating him with kindly respect, and making himself pleasantly at home, was to Sandy Craig's loyal, if rather tough, heart.

Waring's character and bearing too was calculated to go so well with such a nature as his host's. Society of the higher order had stamped upon his simple, unaffected manners, and the readiness with which he turned from a life of mere pleasure to one of work, when he had still enough left to idle on, delighted the old "man of the people." Waring was, to his idea, a sort of ideal incarnation of middle-class merit, the result of plebeian industry which even conquered and appropriated the graces of good-breeding.

This satisfaction was reflected on all around him.

The monthly settlement of house-keeping accounts—a task which even Mona dreaded—was accomplished without a single error. Poor Kenneth's arithmetical errors were passed over with an expression of contempt, in the term "blunderin' gowk," and the contradictions of Robbie Sanders, the gardener, were overruled.

To Mona, this was an unaccountably delightful break in the monotony of her existence. To be good friends with Waring—that he was a better and a stronger man than formerly, the sources of purest pleasure.

Then he was so very reasonable. He worried her with no oppressive looks or words which insinuated lover-like feelings. He liked her to read to him, or to write for him; but he was well pleased with the services of Miss Black, nearly—not quite—when in a talkative mood, he used to describe the wild life of his Californian home quite eloquently. He really had more than she at one time could have believed. He had good good-looking too (Mona was keenly alive to exterior advantages) and she often thought, as he lay back on the sofa cushions with the honest, strong face he had, and how much the thoughtful expression of sadness it had developed, beautified and ennobled.

Then the temporary weakness of his strong frame appeared in the tenderness of her most womanly heart; there was undoubted

endly sympathy between them. Her voice never sounded so sweet, so expressive, as when she read or sang to him. But they were rarely alone together. Mary Black was not behindhand in delicate attentions, and, as Kenneth observed, both young ladies did with each other who should spoil the invalid most.

To Mary, however, most of his talk and good humored chaff was directed. He praised her songs loudly, and said but little about Mona's except now and then an imploring exclamation of "Do go ;" "Another, please, another."

Uncle Sandy, however good-humoured, did not admit of any neglect, and always demanded an hour or more of Mona's time after her early dinner, while she read to him the better part of the famous *Scotsman*, and some portion of the *Times* weekly edition, which reached them every Saturday. Sometimes Waring slept on the drawing-room sofa during this exercise—sometimes he came to tea, while Mary and Kenneth disappeared ; but occasionally the farmer took her work and sat with the "ill mon." The murmur of her voices while thus engaged, with occasional bursts of merriment, came through the door of communication to Mona one afternoon, as she toiled through a heavy leader on "municipal" government, and presently Mary put in her head.

"Mr. Waring says it's so fine and bright, he would like a little run, and I am going with him," she said. "We will be down the river."

"Dinna let him do too much !" cried Uncle Sandy. "We will meet along and meet you."

Waring was now permitted to take exercise, and was rapidly recovering.

"What shall I read next ?" asked Mona. "There is an article about the Soudan—"

"Naw," said her uncle—one of his most negative "naws," which always seemed to Mona as if it could stop a torrent—and he sat in thought for a minute ; then he roused himself.

"I'm thinking," he said, "that Mr. Leslie is growing ower fond of Mary Black. They are aye at havers wi' ane anither, and I am varra pleased. She's no match for Leslie's grandson ; and yet the lassie is a guid lassie. I wadna see her vexed. He is a weel-oken lad forbye—the sort to win ony woman's love. Eh, Mona ?"

"I do not think Mary cares much about him, uncle. Tastes differ dely, you know. As to her being no match for him, you must remember that Mr. Waring has not much in the way of a home to offer. His—"

"Hooot, toot," he interrupted. "It will be a fair home enough. Young Leslie is going to be a successful mon after a bit."

"I am sure I hope so ; but I do not think you need trouble about it. As to Mr. Waring, I daresay he admires her—she is very sweet and charming ; but these fancies do not trouble men long."

"Ay, the sort o' hempies *you've* been used to. But, my lassie, a real thoughtfu' mon, if luv takes hold on his heart, it grips it hard and fast, and will na let go. If young Leslie has let himself luv our Mary, he'll no leave her behind him. He doesna come of the sort that gives in."

"Well I do not think that Mary is in love with him."

"I hope you are right," said her uncle slowly; then, after a pause, he began to struggle to his feet. "Come," he said, "we will go and meet them."

"As it is but a short way, uncle, could you get on without me? I have never answered Madame—I mean Mrs. Fielden's last letter, and I should like to do so this afternoon."

"So do, my dearie, so do. I'll just gang a bit down the road. Maybe I'll meet Kenneth."

Mona escaped as quickly as she could to her own pleasant room, from the window of which she could catch a glimpse of the sea between two hills, and having hastily put out her writing materials, she sat down, leant her head on both hands, her elbows resting on the table, and fell into profound and painful thought.

Her uncle's words had suddenly bared the recesses of her heart, and lo! there lay an unsuspected root of pain and mischief.

That Mary was completely guarded by her warm attachment to Kenneth, Mona did not doubt. That Waring admired her was possible, but she did not believe it was more than a kindly liking.

The revelation to her was this. If Waring really loved Mary, or any other woman, how was she to endure it? The mere idea filled her with despair. The terrible conviction grew upon her that she loved her rejected lover with all the warmth and tenderness of her fine rich nature, not in any half-hearted way, but glowingly, completely. She loved him for the straightforward, honest affection which made him hasten to offer her all he had in her hour of need. She loved him for the delicate consideration which had guided him in their brief engagement, for the forbearance with which he had released her, for the frank kindliness with which he had offered her his friendship when she had refused his love, for the stand he had made against his own follies and weakness, for the resolution with which he had cast off his attitude of lover to herself. She admired and loved his quiet, unpretending strength, his sunburnt face, his big brown eyes that could say so much *if* they chose. Never again could she touch his hand without an electric thrill. She loved him: loved as she never before dreamed she could love, and all in vain. He had put off the lover for ever. She was from his life a thing apart; and he was, or could be, her whole existence. Yet, through all, she did not regret that she had rejected him.

"Then, I should have misunderstood him; we should have drifted apart, as we shall now; but at least I do him justice, *All that remains to me is to hide my own feelings (he shall never pity me), and*

a good-bye for ever with tolerable composure. For ever ! is a hard, cruel fate ! ”

was not of the sentimental, weeping order of young ladies. very white and still, and thought it all out, and resolved on a line of conduct. She would be a kind, pleasant friend hey were together—and after ! Then, indeed would come and despair—a brief parting, probably to meet no more on

ly she gathered herself together, and collected her ideas. he wrote a long gossiping letter to Mrs. Fielden, telling all nts of their little world. This accomplished, she gazed criti- the glass, smoothed her hair, and looked for her hat, hoping e any sign of emotion before meeting any of the party.

happened that Waring asked for one or two particular songs ening. Mona sang them easily and sweetly.

u have not had any bad news ? ” he asked, coming over to y her piano.

What made you think so ? ”

., that I cannot tell ! You look so pale. There was some- I do not know what—in your voice that made me fancy you not so bright as usual.”

hy, Mr. Waring are you growing fanciful ? You will be writ- istry next.”

rhaps I may ! Do you and Miss Black never sing duets ? ”

, yes ! We have one or two. Would you like us to sing r ? ”

s ; very much.”

me, Mary, and try ‘Oh, wert Thou in the Cauld Blast.’ I think we can do much in this way.”

n this was over, Mary was called to play chess with her host, th stole away to enjoy a private smoke, and Mona and Waring ffectually *tete-a-tete*.

ou are wonderfully better, Mr. Waring,” said Mona, who for vas doing nothing, and sat ensconced in a deep arm-chair was well in the shadowy recess of the window, away from the near which the chess-players were seated. Waring, somewhat after his walk, lounged on the sofa, from which, being still in darkness, he could see her profile against the moonlit w.

as ”—suddenly, as if out of his thoughts—“that is exactly have been saying to myself. I short, I feel as if I were g here on false pretences. I ought to be on the move.”

am sure my uncle does not think so ! ”

o ! He has been wonderfully kind, though I have been some enough to tire you all out ? ”

e are not quite tired out yet.”

o, you and Miss Black are a brace of angels ; and, in short, I

must stay till my arm is as strong as ever, which Donaldson promises it shall be. A right arm is important everywhere, but particularly in my new abode. Do I like the idea of returning? Oh, I sha'n't be sorry to be at work again; but the mere going will be awfully hard. I mean I shall be very sorry to say good-bye to you all."

They were both silent for a few moments after this. Then Mona asked, in low dreamy sort of voice,

"What is the chief work on a ranche?"

"There is so much that is chief, I hardly know which comes first. There are cattle and sheep to be looked after; and fields (we have wheat fields) to be ploughed, and sown, and reaped; and horses to break, etc., etc."

"You have plenty to do then?"

"Oh, plenty; and then lots of sport—such heaps of deer, and birds, and bears."

"Bears! That must be rather fearful. Do they ever come near your house?"

"Yes, they come after the hogs. A part of our stock—a large part too—is a big drove of hogs."

"Your partner is not exactly a gentleman?"

"Well one would hardly invite him to a South Kensington æsthetic evening party; but he is a very good fellow—a gentleman as regards keeping his word, and a first-rate shot!"

Another pause. Mona leant her head against the back of her chair, and gazed dreamily at the moonlight, which slumbered in silver radiance on the opposite hillside.

"When was Lisle here?" asked Waring, with startling abruptness.

"Oh, let me see! In the autumn—in September and October."

"I suppose he is the same cool hand as ever?"

"I see very little change in him, except that he looks a good deal older."

"And he has the family estate now? I daresay he will make a good landlord. He understands his own interest."

"I have no doubt he does."

"I daresay he will be in town when I go there, but I shall not try to see him. I have done with that world."

"It is a pleasant world when one is in it, yet I do not regret it either."

"You? Oh, you will flourish in it, I have no doubt!"

"I imagine I am as much cut off from it as you can be."

"No, no! Women like you must always be at a premium—in an ornamental, pleasure-seeking society; some one will persuade you to enter the ranks once more."

Mona laughed a low, mocking laugh—but did not reply.

"How is that capital woman, Madame Debrisay—I mean Mrs. Fielden? I always liked her."

he is very well, I believe, and must be at Barritz by this time. She is the kindest, truest soul! How good she was to me, I never forget."

"And I shall never forget her either. And Lisle—have you not met her since?"

"Not since the autumn, or early winter. He called once or twice and was with Madame Debrisay when she was so ill."

"Indeed!"

After a pause, Then Waring proceeded to inquire for Bertie and many of their former mutual acquaintances, most of whom were lost to sight, and were by no means dear to Mona's memory.

"Suppose I ought to clear out of this in about a fortnight?" Waring, as if to himself.

"Do not think of travelling until you feel sure of your strength," said Mona earnestly. "It would be dreadful to be laid up in a place as you describe your home to be."

"Come! It certainly is not one's idea of home."

"But as the place improves under your hand, you will grow fond

"Suppose so," rather dejectedly. "Of course, I do not intend my days there."

"No! of course not. When you make a fortune, you will pack to England."

"Fortune! If I can screw competence out of it, I shall be

"Competence is enough for anyone," said Mona.

"Yes! I know you do not care for money," returned Waring.

Then they both blushed, and there was a silence of several seconds.

"Suppose Lisle will be up here again?" resumed Waring rather shyly.

"Perhaps! I do not think it likely. I believe my uncle is in treaty with some one else for the shooting, so there will be nothing to come for."

"Nothing to come for," repeated Waring as if to himself; and suddenly thought—"Does he imagine that I am the attraction of St. John Lisle, and does his friendliness incline him to rejoice in the prospect of a good marriage for me?"

"Rose, and went into the next room to find a book, for she did not to talk any more. As she returned, she met Waring, and followed her.

"Good-night," he said. "I am rather tired. Miss Black is waiting for chess, and you are going to read, so I had better go to

"If you would like me to read to you—" began Mona, for there was something desponding in his tone.

"No, no! I exact too much," he interrupted. "I will leave you in peace."

"You know you *exact* nothing."

"That is true. You all give freely. Nevertheless, I will say good-night."

It seemed strange to Mona that Uncle Sandy—who, though on the whole extremely indifferent to things which did not affect himself, was, when his attention was aroused, a keen observer—did not notice the complete understanding which existed between Kenneth and Mary, nor the very lover-like attentions which, as he grew more at ease in his new home, the young Highlander could not refrain from bestowing on the lady of his heart. But as many strong-willed persons do, Uncle Sandy was very apt to make plans without taking into account the individual likings or dislikings of the the persons affected by them.

She rather dreaded the moment when the ruler of Craigdarroch would awake to the knowledge that the "bit lad and lassie," as he considered them, had taken their lives into their own hands, irrespective of his consent. If he was angry and unreasonable on the subject it might be terribly bad for both young creatures, though his evident liking for Mary was a great point in their favour. Indeed Mona wished to turn her thoughts from the pain, the dull aching which oppressed her, to *pros* and *cons* of her friends' fortunes.

It was a few days after the above recorded conversation, Mona was in the library, entering sundry items in an account book, which her uncle had great pride and pleasure in teaching her to keep in the most orthodox fashion.

It was a lovely day stolen from May to beautify the last hours of March. The blue sky, the glittering loch, the balmy air which stole like a caress round cheek and throat, seemed to promise that "gloomy winter was awa'."

Kenneth had taken a holiday from the spring operations of field and byre, and proposed to take Waring and Mary for a drive through Strathairlie and Balmuir, that the former might see some of the fine views in the neighbourhood, as his time was now growing short.

Mona volunteered to remain with her uncle, and—with a degree of unreasonableness, for which she scorned herself—felt hurt that Waring had made no attempt to persuade her to come with them.

Mr. Craig had been pottering about the garden, and Mona thought she had heard the tap tapping of his stick in the hall just before the excursionists had driven off.

The sound of the wheels had hardly died away, when Uncle Sandy *came into the room* and threw himself into his arm-chair, upsetting *his iron* with an unusual amount of clatter.

"Guid preserve us!" was his first exclamation. "They're gane an daft! Wha'd hae thought o' such—such perversity!"

"What is the matter, uncle?" and Mona came over to stand on the hearth-rug opposite him.

"Matter! it's the deil's own matter. Listen to me. When I m' in frae the garden, I saw the chaise at the door, and I went to the hall to ca' them, and was nigh slippin', but got on to the carpet, and into the drawing-room; an' what should I see but Kenneth standin' by the window wi' his arm round Mary Black, and her head on his shoulder, as if she war weel used to it! He was saying, 'My ain love it's hard to have patience;' but, before I could eak oot upon them, I heard Mr. Leslie's voice behind me, and, afore I had rightly recovered my senses, they were awa'. Noo! what do you think o' such a pair o' eediot's—o' worthless, unprincipled eediot's?"

"Well, uncle," began Mona, after a short pause, "I am not surprised. Anyone might have seen they were growing fond of one other; which was not to be wondered at, for—"

"And do you mean to tell me," almost screamed Uncle Sandy, "that ye saw it, and suspected it a' the time, and never warned me?"

"I do not see that it was my duty to do so," said Mona, instinctively feeling that a bold tone was best; "especially as I think Kenneth and Mary would make each other happy, and you too, uncle. You know what a sweet—"

"You'll just drive me aff my heid!" he interrupted. "Don't see that Kenneth needs a wife wi' a tocher—a bit sillier!—a refusin', thoughtfu' woman wha'd be a guide and a stay to him, not that lassie that he'll be Dauvid an' Solomon and the rest to."

"I fancy there is much more probability that Kenneth would be the wiser and stronger for the companionship of a woman that looks up to him."

"Whaur's the use of argufying? Mary Black is no the wife I want for my nayfew; an' if he crosses me, I'll just pit him oot. Why could I gie my money to a feckless loon wha hasna the sense to consult me in the mair important step o' his road?"

"But, uncle, of all the steps a man can take, the most important himself is matrimony. Now, where would you find a sweeter girl than Mary? You miss her yourself when she goes; can't you fancy Kenneth making a happy home for you and caring for you? Suppose he married a rich girl, who had been educated at some private school, do you think she would be content to live here as a housekeeper, and have no change from year's end to year's end?"

"And what for shouldn't she?"

"I do not know why; but I am quite sure most girls would tire of Craigdarroch, sweet and lovely as it is; even I do."

"You!—you tire of a braw home like this?"

"Oh, I shall be pleased to come back; but I like to go away sometimes; and I am old of my years."

"Aweel, I deserve that o' Kenneth that he shouldna hae spoken to a lassie without asking me first!"

"Why, that is more than a father could expect from a son; and, besides, we do not know how long these two may have loved each other—perhaps before you had any claim on Kenneth."

"Ech, the follies o' children dinna reckon!"

"Don't you think if Miss Leslie had loved *you*, uncle, you would have clung to her though 'faither and mither and a' should go mad?"

"Ah, my lassie, but that was a' different. She was a gran' young leddie, wi' five figures to her tocher; an', Mona, my dear, a mon thinks a deal o' the girl that's just abune his reach."

"Perhaps so, uncle; but the *true* man thinks the girl within his reach just as sacred and precious, if she is dear to him."

A quick sob rose in Mona's throat as she spoke, and Uncle Sandy, in his quickened condition of mind, observed—

"What's wrang wi' ye?" he asked. "You're no fond o' the laddie yoursel'?"

"Only in a sisterly way, I assure you. I am deeply interested in his welfare."

"Sae am I; but I canna see it's for his welfar' to wed wi' a penniless bairn."

"A bairn that would look on you as a father, and be a daughter to you, Uncle Sandy!"

"Naw, its no use telling me sic a like tale. I doot that onybody wad be as guid to me as you are, Mona; and I want Kenneth to get a fortin' wi' his wife, that I may gie you a better tocher, my dearie. You'll wed a gran' gentleman some day, and you *must* be weel tochered."

"Uncle!" cried Mona earnestly, "you must not think of that! My possible marriage is a long way off, and I will go away and leave you if you let me come between my cousin and happiness."

"If you must go, you must," said Uncle Sandy sternly, though his voice was unsteady. "I did without you before, and I can again."

"That is for you to consider. Now, uncle, make me a promise."

"What is it?" he asked cautiously.

"While Mr. Waring stays, make no disturbance. He has been so comfortable here, let him take away his good impression unimpaired. If you speak to Kenneth, and show displeasure, Mary will go away, and her people will forbid her to speak to Kenneth; our pleasant life will be broken up; I shall be too distressed to remain; I shall accept General and Mrs. Fielden's often repeated invitation to go and stay with them in Paris; and you will bully poor Kenneth till he does not know a mangle wuzzel from a kale."

"You are just a trifle too clever, missee!" said Uncle Sandy, irritated, but not conquered. "I dinna understand why you are so strong on they fules' side. However, I'll mak' no disturbance while Mr. Leslie is in my hoose. But promise—for promise you must—"

gie me your word not to let them know I am acquaint wi' their foolishness."

Mona was silent for a moment or two, while she thought that it would do no good to put the offending pair on their guard.

"Very well," she said; "I promise. But you must not be cross; you must be nice and kind, as you have been."

"I'm muckle obleeged to you for the compliment," dryly.

"And, uncle, don't think I want to leave you. I am grateful to you, and I like you; I am interested in you, for you are full of character; but if you are unjust to Kenneth on my account, or if you doubt me, and try to worry me into marrying anyone I do not like, I shall just go away, because—"

"Because what?" asked Mr. Craig, somewhat struck by her tone.

"Because I do not care a straw what becomes of me!"

She turned and left the room abruptly.

Mr. Craig looked after her, immensely puzzled.

"What's come to the lassie?" he said. "She's nae like hersel." She is just deep in love wi' Kenneth. I always thocht it, and I am seldom wrang. I'll keep a calm sough, an' maybe things may come right. That Mary is a bonnie girlie, douce an' handy—but, na, na! there are few can come up to my ain niece!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

THIS premature discovery was very embarrassing to Mona. Her conviction that it would make matters worse if Mary or Kenneth knew that Uncle Sandy's eyes had been opened, gave her courage, however, to keep it a secret from the parties most interested. It would be a great gain if he grew accustomed to the idea of the engagement before he was able to fly out and pledge himself to opposition, for to an obstinate, headstrong nature like his, retraction was almost impossible. He had an immense contempt for men who threatened and did not execute.

But Mona felt infinitely depressed, and singularly lonely. If she could but see the question of Kenneth's engagement set at rest, she would certainly take leave of absence and pay her dear Deb a visit. Not that she could ever tell even that dear friend the secret of her inner sorrow; but the sound of her kind voice—the change, would bring relief.

Uncle Sandy was in a very queer temper after this discussion. He was querulous and complaining, yet occasionally obsequious to his niece, on whom he had grown very dependent, and of whose independence he stood in awe.

Waring felt that something had gone wrong, and watched Mona's expressive face with profound sympathy.

"Let me come with you," he said, one afternoon, when she had complained of a headache, and begged Mary to read to Mr. Craig, while she went to try the fresh air cure.

"Very well," she returned. "I will show you my favourite haunt."

They proceeded through the grounds into the group of oak trees beyond. On the edge of the little wood was a bench, from which was a view of the sea, between two rocky hills. A narrow ravine opened steeply down to the beach, widening as it descended, and here, on its sheltered sides, the first primroses, the earliest yellow honey-scented gorse blossoms were to be found. Behind the seat were big grey boulders, scattered among the tall brackens, and from the little space of level ground where it stood, the hillside rose steeply up.

"It is a delicious place to read in," said Mona, as they sat down.

"On a very still day you can hear the dash and ripple of the waves down there like a soft accompaniment to your thoughts, or the thoughts you are reading. Then, later on, the hum of the bees as they gather the honey from the whins, as Uncle Sandy calls them, makes a complete harmony with the whisper of the wavelets. It is enough to make a poet even of my uncle."

"I daresay," said Waring, resting his elbow on his knee, and his head on his hand, while his eyes dwelt on hers with the grave yearning expression they often wore—"I daresay your uncle thinks he might be the best poet in the kingdom, if he 'laid his mind to it,' as he would say himself."

Mona laughed.

"Very likely. I suppose his good opinion of himself has been a lever to hoist himself withal."

"No doubt. It strikes me he is very exacting. You have seemed to me weary, and—and depressed, of late. Does he worry very much?"

"He is really very good. I have nothing to complain of. I have been depressed lately because I am puzzled. I am greatly tempted to tell you why, and to ask your advice."

"Do," said Waring, changing his position, and looking out to sea. "At least you may trust me too keep counsel, and if I can do anything, need I say, command me?"

"Then here is my story." She proceeded to detail the history of Kenneth's engagement, and Uncle Sandy's accidental discovery.

"You see it's a very serious matter," she concluded. "Kenneth is quite dependent on Uncle Sandy, and were he out of favour, and dismissed, both would be in a very hopeless condition!"

"I see that. I trust old Craig won't turn rusty; it would be very cruel. How can anyone be in the house with them and not see the state of affairs? They seem to me made for each other. But yet

have done the best you could in getting your uncle to keep quiet. He will get used to the idea."

"Then, Mr. Waring, the help you can give me—I mean us—is to talk in a natural, easy way to Uncle Sandy about Kenneth's engagement, as if you considered it a settled thing, from your own observation."

"Well, I do," said Waring.

"My uncle, I can see, has a very high opinion of you—you have a sort of mysterious influence upon him—so you must give Kenneth and Mary all the help you can."

"My having any influence on so shrewd a man as Mr. Craig must seem a considerable mystery to you," said Waring, laughing. "I feel much flattered, and will do the best I can for the cause."

Both were silent for a few minutes, then Waring asked a little abruptly—

"Where is Madame—I mean Mrs. Fielden—now?"

"In Paris, where they intend to make some stay."

"I was in hopes they might be in London. I should like to see Mrs. Fielden again—I think she is a capital woman!"

"She is indeed!—a true, loving friend! And when do you think of leaving?" asked Mona, steadying her voice by an effort.

"Oh, about this day week! I must go then. And my arm is nearly as good as new. By the time I get to the end of my journey, I shall be quite fit for work."

"And—and how do you like the idea of going back to the woods?" this in a low tone.

"Like it! There is no use in thinking about liking what must be. I have cut myself adrift from every other kind of life, so I must and will make it answer; but it—it's an awful wrench to go. I can't deny that! Still—" He broke off, and meeting her eyes, exclaimed—"If you look so sorry for me, I shall make a fool of myself. That is," flushing sympathetically as he saw her colour rise, "I shall whine and bemoan my hard fate, in a fashion that will not increase any gleams of respect you may have for me."

"Is she afraid I am forgetting the bitter lesson she once gave me?" thought he.

"Does he imagine I am fishing for an avowal of the affection which has died out?" thought she.

"I assure you I do not suspect you of any such weakness. I daresay you will find your new home and life pleasant enough."

"Oh, very likely! Indeed, given certain conditions, I can imagine enjoying life on the ranche very much—though we are twenty-five miles from the nearest 'city,' as it is called—and it is merely a big village, minus the rusticity of a village, and plus the gas, the gilding, the looking-glasses, the gambling, the cheating, the orgies of a big modern town."

"What an awful place!" said Mona. "You must be glad to have twenty-five miles between your home and it."

"Between my place of abode and it," he returned. "Well, yes! though there are inconveniences. Yet you would be surprised if you knew how many good fellows—kindly, brave, generous—are scattered about among the general rowdy population, like nuggets in dirt. Are you going—"

"Yes, you have sat here long enough. The sun is beginning to go down."

"You forget that a broken arm does not constitute an invalid. I am as strong as a horse now."

"Perhaps so. Then the country is very fine about these dreadful 'cities'?"

"Superb! The redwoods on the edge of which I am located are the finest stretch of forest you can imagine. I am afraid to tell you the dimensions of the trees—you would think I was romancing; then the beauty and luxuriance of the undergrowth, such feed for hogs—not very interesting stock, I acknowledge, but very profitable—while in the more open spaces, and where it has been cleared, such a soil for wheat. Then, of course, we have a number of *employees*—hunters, herdsmen, keepers of various kinds, and some Chinamen for servants. The climate is perfection, the sunsets and sunrises marvellously lovely."

"What a wonderful country! You ought to be happy there."

"There are one or two things wanting—still one cannot have everything. You see, my friend and partner Wells is a queer fellow, sharp and clever in his way. He got hold of this ranche by a lucky chance. An old hunter had got it for a song some years ago. He did a good deal in clearing and improving, till he came to the end of his cash, and got sick of being settled. So Wells bought it as it stood cheap enough, then he found he hadn't a penny left. Just about that time I wandered into San Francisco and met him, so we entered into partnership. I hope to buy him out by-and-by."

"I think," said Mona, "were I a man, I should rather like the life; but it must be lonely."

"Oh, it would be terrible for a woman, I am afraid," said Waring, with a sigh. "I must take out some tough books with me, to provide for the winter evenings."

"How long shall you be in London?"

"About a week."

"It will be full, as it is near Easter. Shall you not look up some of your old friends? The contrast would amuse you."

"No, I have done with all that! There are some relations of my father's on whom I must call—but I really do not care to see anyone else."

This conversation had lasted while they made the tour of a stony heathery piece of land outside the low, moss-grown wall which

enclosed the lawn and bit of pleasure ground, and came out upon the road leading to Kirkcubright.

As they paused to look at the sunset, and just as Waring had uttered the last words, a gentleman on foot came round a turn of the road. Waring's brow contracted; he glanced swiftly at his companion, and exclaimed—

"By Jove! it is Lisle!"

In another moment Lisle was lifting his hat and shaking hands with Mona.

"Waring!" he exclaimed, in a tone of extreme surprise. "Waring! by all that's astonishing. Where—how—what has brought you here?"

"Chiefly railways and steamboats."

"My uncle knew some of Mr. Waring's people. They met in Glasgow, and Mr. Waring came back with him."

"I thought you were lost for ever!" cried Lisle, in a tone which did not express very lively pleasure at his turning up again.

"Well, here I am, you see, considerably the better for a sojourn in the wilds."

"So it seems. Why, you look years older!"

"Now, Sir St. John, pray account for yourself," said Mona.

"Your sudden appearance requires explanation, as well as Mr. Waring's."

"Does it?" said Lisle, flashing a quick glance into her eyes.

"Well, Finistoun was coming north for a little rest and fishing, so, as we both had had enough of gay and festive scenes for the present, I came with him, and am staying in my old quarters at Kirkcubright for a day or two. 'How is a' wi' ye?' as your quaint old uncle would say."

"We are all remarkably well. He will be a good deal surprised to see you."

"More surprised than delighted, I suspect."

"It takes a great deal to *delight* Uncle Sandy; but I think he was always placidly pleased to see you."

"And how goes the Highland cousin? Has he grown reconciled to his uncle's plans?"

"Oh, no!" cried Mona, laughing; "he is more irreconcilable than ever."

Then Lisle asked for Madame Debrisay, and described with cool sarcasm the surprise and indignation of General Fielden's friends at that warrior's marriage.

Waring was very silent. Mona's quick intelligence told her that each man was annoyed by the sight of the other; Waring, of course, did not care to meet the man who had advised a step which led to pain and mortification; while the other—well, she understood his irritation clearly enough.

Lisle imparted a good deal of London gossip before they reached the house, and was then duly introduced to Uncle Sandy.

"Eh, but I'm varra pleased to see you!" he said, with unusual warmth. "It's an uncommon time o' year for a Londoner to come among the hills."

"You see, Craigdarroch always has its attractions."

"Maybe so, maybe so. It will be lookin' brawly in another month. And now you'll tak' a bit supper wi' us. We have supper at eight, and Kenneth will put you on your way back."

"Thanks; I shall be most happy. I need not trouble your nephew. In your well-ordered country the roads are as safe at midnight as mid-day."

"That's true!" emphatically. "I am glad you're aware o't. That great, lang, self-opeenionated young woman—how d'ye ca' her!—that just turned up her nose (mair than nature had done for her) against Scotland to a Scotchman!—that wasna weel-mannered for a lady that goes to the Queen's Court, they tell me."

"Oh! the Court is a regular *olla podrida* now," said Lisle.

"A what? What tongue is that?"

"Spanish. It means a general mixture."

"Eh, powsowdie is the same thing; that's rale Scotch, and mair expressive and wiselike. Weel, that tall leddy would hold her ain in the biggest powsowdie of a'. Where is she?"

"You mean Miss Morton! She is the most appalling female I know. She has captured a Greek prince, who goes to balls in a white petticoat, and says he is descended from Alcibiades."

"Eh, he wad be a shifty sort of a great-grandfather to have!" cried Uncle Sandy, who piqued himself on being a "soond clausical scholar."

"Well, this fellow is about up to her shoulder, and rather a doubtful personage. They are fighting over settlements at present; for though she is said to be fathoms deep in love, she does not like to lose her grip of the L. S. D."

"And varra right she is. Noo, the tea is ready, come awa and have a cup."

It was, on the whole, an uneasy sort of afternoon and evening. A sense of unfitness—a want of harmony, oppressed everyone, though Mona and Kenneth did their utmost to entertain their guests. Both the girls sang and played and talked their best. Indeed, Mona was unusually gracious to Lisle, yet he was dissatisfied, and left with Kenneth early, saying that he was bound to Lord Finistoun for the next day, but the following he would come to see them, as he was going back to town on Saturday night.

At luncheon next day, when the post came in, Waring, after reading his letters, announced that he must start on Monday, that he had been away too long, and it was time he returned.

To Mona this was a cruel stab. He was, then, to vanish away from her—this frank, kind, brave man, whose qualities were the complement of her own, for whose troubles she felt responsible, and

whose wounds it would have been the sweetest and most congenial ask to heal, and she dared not try to hold him ! No ; if it cost her her life, she could make no effort to reveal herself. He was her friend, and nothing more. Yet a vague, dim belief breathed through her heart that he loved her still, to justify which there was not a tittle of evidence.

"I did not know you were here," said Miss Black, coming into her drawing-room the day after this visit, and finding Waring seated with a book before him and his head on his hands. "Where is Mona ?"

"She has gone out with Mr. Craig."

"Will you come with me and look for them ?"

"No, thank you ; I am searching for one or two books I brought here, and I want to put them up. You see, I have only two days left to-morrow."

"I am sorry you are going, Mr. Waring."

"I am gratified to hear you say so. How sorry I shall be to leave you all, it would not be easy to say."

"Well, I think you look sad like, Mr. Waring. You must write Kenneth, and tell us all about yourself."

"Mary !" exclaimed Waring, after a short pause, and not aware of his own familiarity, "what do you think brings that fellow Lisle here ?"

"He says it's fishing ; and so it is, but not with a rod and line."

"Then it is Mona ?"

Mary bent her head in the affirmative.

"At least I fancy so," she said. "He used to be up here in the autumn, and Kenneth thought he would have asked her then."

"I suppose it will be what is considered a good match ; but she is too good for him !"

"You might say that of a good many."

"You think so ?"

"Yes. Don't you ?"

"I do ; and I suppose Miss Craig will soon be transformed into Lady Lisle."

"I cannot think so ; she never seems to me to care about him. I have always imagined she loves someone we know nothing about ; but I have no right to say so."

"No, we have no right to conjecture what she feels or thinks ; only I trust in God what she does, and whoever she chooses, she will be happy."

He left the room abruptly as he uttered the words.

"Ah !" exclaimed Mary aloud, as she looked after him, and then stopped to run over in her own mind a dozen or more of slight indications, which, viewed by the new light that had broken in upon her, made proofs as strong as Holy Writ of the feeling entertained by Waring for her admired friend. "And oh ! she does not care

for him either, and he is honest and true—I am sure he is," thought Mary. "Stay! doesn't she care for him? I am not so sure. Oh! where is Kenneth? I will go and talk to him."

The morning after this conversation rose bright and fair, though the night had been so stormy that between the howling wind and her own distressful thoughts Mona got little sleep.

"I must go down to the fishers," said Kenneth at breakfast. "I hear the two Mackilligans have been nearly drowned, and their boat is stove in. Jock is severely hurt. They were driven ashore in the gale last night."

"I'll come with you," said Waring.

"You are just killing yourself," said Uncle Sandy, who was busy supping his porridge. "You look like a ghaist as it is! You'll no be fit for a lang journey if ye gang this gate."

"Oh! I am perfectly fit I assure you, whatever my looks may be. If I did not rise up like a giant refreshed after the care and nursing I have had in this establishment, I should not be worth taking care of."

"Weel, I dinna ken what's come to ye a'; there's Mona wi' a white face, and you w' a lang ane, and Kenneth's like a bag o' banes. Mary is the best o' ye. It is a comfort to look at a cheerfu', healthfu' countenance," said Uncle Sandy, who had been extremely fractious for the last ten days.

"What a compliment, Mary! I feel quite ashamed of myself!" cried Mona.

"Let me know when you are ready to start," said Waring to Kenneth, and soon after the two young men started to see what assistance they could afford to the shipwrecked fishermen, Uncle Sandy calling out injunctions to Kenneth as he went not to commit him "to mend a' the broken boats in the parish."

"And wha'll drive me into the toun?" asked Mr. Craig. "I must gang to the bank, forbye the minister's and Jimmy Tulloch's."

"Mary will go with you, uncle. I have rather a headache, and I daresay Kenneth and Mr. Waring will be back to luncheon."

"I hope so. I am not weel content wi' Mr. Leslie. I hope you have nae been fashing him wi' your idle clavers. He needs rest and kind treatment."

"I think we have been very good and prudent, eh, Mary!"

"Aweel, let us have the denner at one o'clock punctually."

"I will see to it, uncle."

The dinner hour came, but brought neither Kenneth nor Waring, and Uncle Sandy having been comforted with a good many "draps o' whisky," and wrapped up with care, started, under Miss Black's escort, for the diminutive town of Kirkcubright.

It was a relief to Mona to be alone, but it oppressed her to be within doors. She got her hat, and threw a plaid round her shoulders, intending to commune with her own heart in the fresh, sweet air.

"I must put away this deplorable weakness. Where is my pride, that I cannot resist this overwhelming tenderness for a man who does not care about me?"

"If the gentlemen return and ask for me, Jessie," she said to the housemaid, who was doing some extra dusting in the hall, "I shall be by the wood, at the big oak tree seat."

"Here's ane comin', mem," said the girl, and Lisle came up the steps as she spoke.

"Going to walk," said that gentleman cheerfully; "may I come too?"

"Will you not have some luncheon first?"

"No, thank you; I had luncheon early with Finistoun, who dropped me near this on his way to Balmuir. It is quite spring like after the storm last night. It kept you awake I suspect. Your eyes—those loadstone eyes of yours—droop."

"I did not sleep much certainly. Then, if you will not have any luncheon, we will go to my favourite point of view, and look at the sea: it will be very fine to-day."

"By all means."

"They walked on in silence for some little way, and then Lisle exclaimed,—

"I never was so amazed in my life as when I saw Waring with you! It seemed as if he was to be your fate! What possessed him to come here to singe his wings again, poor devil?"

"Your compassion is wasted," said Mona, a slight smile curling her haughty mouth. "Mr. Waring is much improved, and seems quite fire-proof."

"If he is, why he deserves to be called, in your uncle's parlance, a varra remarkable person."

"Pray leave my uncle alone," said Mona, smiling in spite of herself.

"Very well. Where is everyone? Are you all alone?"

"Yes, just at present. Kenneth and Mr. Waring have gone to the fisher village, my uncle and Mary to the town."

"Then the fates are at last propitious!" cried Lisle. "I have been singularly unlucky as regards yourself of late. Now pray sit down" (they had reached the rustic bench) "and hear me. You have slipped from my grasp over and over again; you must hear me to-day."

Mona cast a troubled look round, and then suddenly took courage, resolving to make an end of the matter

"Yes," she said nervously, and somewhat louder than usual, "I will hear you, Sir St. John."

She sat down, and he placed himself beside her.

"Of course you know what I am going to say. You know—you must know—that I loved you from the first hour we met, and that although in justice to you I made the unselfish effort to recommend your marrying Waring when poor Mrs. Newburgh met with such losses, I do not suppose you can form an idea of what it cost me to make such a sacrifice."

"I am sorry to have caused you pain," said Mona, in a low, clear tone. "I am sure your advice was disinterested."

"It was indeed. I confess I was surprised at the worldly tact with which you adopted my suggestion."

"I was carefully brought up in a good school," said Mona demurely.

"No school on earth could have given you the indescribable charm nature has bestowed!" cried Lisle passionately. "I never loved any woman as I love you! Mona, do hear me. Cast away this cold sweetness, that is enough to madden any man. Give me your love, give me a right to it!" He seized and kissed her hand, which she withdrew. "There was a time when your hand trembled in mine, and—"

"My nerves are much steadier now," she said calmly. "It is treachery to let you say more, when I have nothing to give in return, and it pains me infinitely to pain you, but I cannot be your wife."

"Then there is some infernal mystery at the bottom of it. First you throw Waring over in the most unaccountable manner; now you reject me. You prefer the awful seclusion of this wild place, the society of these educated ploughmen, to the world my wife could command? Mona, you cannot be indifferent to such passionate love as mine, unless you love someone else."

"That does not follow," she returned uneasily, and very anxious to get rid of him.

"Who is it?" persisted Lisle, who was raging with mortification and disappointment. "Can it be that the hero of the rejected addresses has found favour in your eyes after all?—a great over-grown schoolboy, who is weak enough to let himself be robbed and plundered by professed gamblers and designing promoters, and then skulks off to hide himself in the wilds of California, like other defeated desperadoes. Your first instinct was right, when you rejected a man who was unfit to be your protector."

"Stop!" cried Mona, moved by a sudden generous impulse to do justice to the man she loved. "Your judgment was right. My instinct, if it was instinct, was wrong. Mr. Waring deserved my love, and he has it! You are again right, you see. He has shaken off the early failings which made him so eager to throw himself between me and the ruggedness of poverty, and I have learned to know him *when it is too late*. Your confession deserves confidence on my part."

I feel I can trust my secret to the loyalty of a gentleman ; and though I am not the woman to throw myself at the feet of one who is indifferent to me, as Leslie Waring is now, I am not ashamed to own that he has my gratitude, my respect, my heart, and in it there is no room for another."

The tone in which she uttered these words, the indescribable dignity and tenderness of her air, of the slight gesture of the hand with which she emphasised her speech—touched and silenced Lisle.

"You are an extraordinary girl," he said at length ; "and if Waring does not love you (I suppose you must know), it seems incredible. Well, if he does not, I do not despair. You are worth winning. I will not trespass on you any longer ; but I will not say good-bye—I shall seek you again when the sea rolls between you and the most unlucky dog I have ever known or heard of. To be loved by you, and not to know it. What irony of fate ! For the present—sweetest and most provoking of women—farewell."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST STATE OF THAT MAN.

"I DINNA ken what's come to ye," said Uncle Sandy, in very discontented tones, as he pushed away his plate and held out the teacup he had just emptied, to be replenished. "There canna be better or purer air than at Craigdarroch. It's aye west or south ; yet there's Mona wi' a bad headache, wantin her breakfast in her room, an' Mr. Leslie lookin'—nae, but ye look better than ye did yesterday," glancing at him, "only ye dinna eat. What's a bit haddie an' a mouthfu' o' toast to stay a mon's stomach i' the mornin' ?"

"Oh ! I am all the better for my ramble with Kenneth yesterday."

"You are well-nigh yoursel' again : but I was feared ye'd be goin' too far when I hard ye hadnae come back at tea-time."

"I left Kenneth because he was going further on. I came back by Monksleugh and the oak wood. I hope Miss Craig's headache is not very severe." She's more tired like than in pain. She wants quiet. Aweel, she went to bed airly enough," quoth Uncle Sandy, "to get it."

"I daresay she will come down soon. Jessie says there is a new brood of chickens out, Mr. Craig," said Mary. "Twelve wee birdies, all strong and lively."

"Ay, that's varra good. Now there's anither fast early train to Glasgow, we'll dispose o' a good pairt o' the poultry varra profitably. I'd go down and look at the chuckies if Mona were here."

"And wouldn't you take my arm, Mr. Craig, for want of a better?" said Mary, blushing very sweetly.

"Yes, I will, my bairnie," said the old man, looking at her indulgently. Sandy Craig had a great liking for a pretty face. "We'll go and have a crack wi' the henwife."

Later, Mona, thinking from the profound stillness that she had the house to herself, came from the seclusion of her own room to the drawing-room. She had been greatly agitated by her interview with Lisle, and greatly distressed, on reflection, to think she had trusted the secret of her love for Waring to a man whom she could not help considering an enemy. Yet she did not quite wish her words unsaid. She wished to honor the man she preferred, in the eyes of the rival who despised him; but she hoped and prayed that the knowledge of this admission might never reach Waring. Perhaps, indeed probably, he had formed some fresh attachment, which held his heart against her. "After all," she thought, as she stopped to look at herself in a long glass at the end of the room, and saw that the long straight folds and close-fitting bodice of her dark blue serge, with the broad band and buckle that showed the easy roundness of her waist, the scarf of old lace round her throat, the soft wavy masses of her reddish gold hair, became her well,—"after all, I am not worse looking than I used to be; but that does not matter."

With a sigh she opened the piano, and began to play dreamily. How fast the days were slipping away. To-morrow would be his last at Craigdarroch, and then good-bye for ever.

"Is the headache quite gone?" said Waring, coming up behind her.

Mona started, and changed colour.

"Yes, nearly gone. You startled me! I thought you were out."

She met his eyes as she spoke, and something of indescribable tenderness in them made her heart stand still. She rose and went to the window.

"It is cold and raw to-day," she said, with a slight shiver.

Returning to the fire, she leant against the mantelpiece. Waring put his arms on the top of a high-backed chair opposite her, and said, with a quick sigh,—

"The days cannot be too dark and dreary to suit my spirit. I cannot gather courage enough to think of Monday!"

"It is coming very fast," said Mona softly, and keeping her eyes fixed on the fire, but feeling that Waring's were fastened on herself.

"Will you think me weak, selfish, worthless, if I cannot leave you without saying how dearly I love you! To think how near I came to calling you my wife; and now we are but strangers to each other. Don't you see how bitterly hard it was? Oh! you were right to break with me, if you could not love me. It would have been misery to us both, if you could not have loved me. But it was all

itter despair at the time ! To think that you preferred poverty and the desertion of your relatives to me, and all I could have given you then "

" Ah, Mr. Waring ! " cried Mona, covering her face with her hands, " can you forgive me ? "

" I do not reproach you, " he returned. " I was not worthy of you, or I should not have gone to the bad as I did, because I was disappointed. But when I came back to life from that terrible fever, I felt another man. I felt I had a duty to myself that forbade this unmanly abandonment, and I have been stronger ever since. I was even getting over the painful longing for you. And now we have met, and I am worse than ever. And you, you seem sweeter than ever ! I feel as if I could *not* leave you ! "

He pushed the chair from him, and came to stand beside her, his eyes full of love and sorrow, his plain face beautified by the spirit that animated him.

The fire of heaven seemed to Mona to have descended on her heart, and filled it with joy unspeakable. She let her hands drop, and, quivering from head to foot, she almost whispered, —

" Then do not leave me. "

" Ah, Mona ! " said Waring, drawing close to her, " do not tempt me to a renewal of suffering ! I am too desperately in earnest to be played with ; and I dare not hope that you, who rejected me when I could have given you a life of ease, would share my wild, uncouth home with me now. Sweetest, how dare I hope ! "

He drew her gently into his arms.

" Take me with you, " said Mona, raising her eyes to his, and letting him read in them more than words could say.

" My darling ! it is more than I can believe ! Mona, in our short engagement I do not believe you ever gave me a kiss. If you will give yourself to me now, put your arms around my neck and kiss me of your own free will. "

There was an instant's hesitation, and then her arms stole gently to his neck, and her lips were pressed to the brown cheek he bent to them, but for a second, before his lips were on hers, clinging to them softly, passionately, as if he drew his soul's life from that sweet mouth.

" No, not yet ! I cannot let you go yet. Tell me, when did you learn to love me ? "

" I cannot tell, Leslie. I have never been indifferent to you since — since I refused to marry you ; and when I saw you, I soon began to think I should like to atone to you. "

" Then it is only pity, perhaps ? "

" I do not know what it is, " said Mona, with a sigh, as she rested her head against his shoulder ; " I only know that you must not leave me. "

" And all this time of delicious torture ! " cried Waring, " when

I ruled myself with a rod of iron lest I should show you the love that was burning my heart out, you imposed upon me with iciness of mere friendship. No man could have dreamed that there was any warmth under such an exterior."

"How did you come to speak to me at last?" asked Mona with a smile.

"It was an inspiration," said Waring. "I do not know how many kisses you owe me for the miserable moments I have had here."

"No more now, dear Leslie," she said, in a low voice, her cheek growing pale, her frame trembling, as he drew her to him.

"Not one?" he whispered, and he released her, while his heart beat with the glorious consciousness that she loved as passionately as he did himself. "I am afraid, Mona," he resumed, after a delicious silence, "that your uncle will not like to let you come into the wilds with me. But the place is not really bad; it has been cleared for a considerable time, and—"

"Poor Uncle Sandy!" she interrupted. "I think he would be willing to give you the best he had; and I am by no means sure he considers me that."

"Needs must. He will miss you dreadfully."

"Then will be the opportunity to suggest Mary as my successor."

"Exactly. Shall I ask Kenneth to join me in making a double demand! You are the ruling spirit here."

"That would be too much. But, pray, speak to my uncle to-day. He deserves to be told at once."

Dinner was got through somehow. Both Kenneth and Mary instinctively felt that something or other had taken place; the former had a shrewd idea what.

About a couple of hours after the family meal, a knock was heard at the door of Mona's room, where she had entrenched herself till the awful explanation with her uncle had been accomplished.

"Your uncle wants to speak to you, Mona," said Waring.

"Oh, Leslie! How is he?"

"The glass is at fair weather. Come along."

Uncle Sandy was looking pale, and was sitting unusually upright in his arm-chair in the library when Mona, with downcast eyes, and the air of a culprit, came in, closely followed by Waring.

"Aweel," he said, in a solemn and somewhat tremulous tone, "I have been hearing what the grandson o' my auld maister has to say. Noo, Mona, my bairn, are you willing to tak this mon to be your wedded husband?"

"I am, uncle," she said, softly but clearly.

"If ye are, nane has a right to withstan' you. I would be well

content if ye had not to gae sae far awa'; and I'll feel your loss sair, but ye maun follow the husband you've chosen."

"Dear uncle," said Mona, the tears hanging on her long lashes, "It will grieve me, too, to leave you; you have been a father to me, and I thank you."

She knelt beside him and kissed his thin hand.

"An' a faither I'll be to ye, my lambie. Mrs. Leslie, my niece, shall have five thoosan' pounds to her tocher; and it's glad I'll be that some of my hard earnin's go to the son of the hoose by which I earned it. But I'll be a lonely mon when ye leave me."

"You need not be, unless you choose. You can have a niece to read to you and write for you, and take care of you. Think of it, uncle dear! Make Kenneth as happy as—as I am."

"Yes, uncle—for you must let me call you so. There could not be a better or more suitable wife found for Kenneth than the one he has found for himself!" cried Waring.

"Aweel, aweel, I will think of it; but, my lad, ye maun promise me you'll bring Mona back to see me ance mair before I die."

"I do promise you, Uncle Sandy; faithfully promise you."

The dramatic taste of moderns will not permit that minute distribution of fortune to each character which all well constituted readers ought to demand. None of ours came however to any tragic end, nor was Lisle's confirmed bachelorhood very detrimental to his happiness.

For the satisfaction of that estimable but diminutive portion of the public who would "ask for more," the curtain shall go up for a few minutes on the last tableaux.

Winter and summer had come and gone three times, and a glowing golden autumn was gilding the hills and deepening the purple heather, when Mona and her husband strolled together once more to the seat by the big oak tree.

"After all, Leslie, I believe I love this view the best of any."

"I am quite sure I do," said Waring, a smile stealing into his brown eyes and spreading over his healthy, happy face.

"Why are you so fond of it?" asked Mona, settling her head comfortably against his shoulder.

"Because—well, I will tell you a secret, the only one I have had from you."

"How dare you, sir? Confess at once!"

"Well, I don't think you'll mind now. The day before you deigned to accept me, I had been roaming about with Kenneth and got tired of everything, life included, so I left and strolled up the hollow there till I found myself beside those big stones, where the bracken still grows so high, and I threw myself down amongst them and thought what an unhappy devil I was, when I heard Lisle's

voice close by, and before I could stir, you were both seated here. I hesitated, and lost my chance of appearing, until I heard too much to make it advisable to show. Then I listened, and if ever a fellow was lifted into the highest heaven of pride and delight, I was that day."

"What! did you hear everything I said?"

"Every word! So that I did not know how to behave myself like a rational creature, and pretended all the evening to be so tired. You see, it would never have done to let you know. But I had not heard from your own lips that you liked me—well, better than Lisle, I should never have broken silence."

"Is it possible? I understand though! It is well you kept the secret. I should have been so awfully vexed."

"Yes; I knew that."

"Just imagine my ever having hidden things from you, and being a stranger, and fearing you should look into my heart and see what a goose I was. We could never misunderstand each other now, we have grown so like."

"As the husband, so the wife is—thou art mated to a clown!" quoted Waring, laughing.

"Hush!" she interrupted; "you shall not say impertinent things of my good man! But it is nearly half-past four; we must go back. Mary ordered the carriage for us to go and meet General and Mrs. Fielden at five, and you know what a punctual little house-mother she is."

"Very well; but first you might give a fellow a kiss for the sake of old times."

"Yes, for past and present both, my own dear."

THE END.

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